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JULY 28, 1923

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The House of Rogues *by* Christopher B. Booth

TRAGEDY AND INTRIGUE AT A COUNTERFEITERS' HEADQUARTERS



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Vol. LIX

Contents for July 28, 1923

No. 4

FOUR SERIALS

House of Rogues	Christopher B. Booth	5
A Five-part Story—Part One		
Gems of Ill Omen	Douglas Grey	32
A Five-part Story—Part Two		
The Safety Pin	J. S. Fletcher	63
A Six-part Story—Part Five		
The Glass Dagger	Arthur Mallory	96
A Three-part Story—Part Three		

NOVEL AND SHORT STORIES

Ten Jumps Ahead	Paul Ellsworth Triem	23
"Keep Off the Grass"	Kenneth Duane Whipple	53
Jerry, the Boaster. (Complete Novel)	Harrington Strong	81
"Not According to Text"	Charles G. Booth	128

TWO ARTICLES

Great Escapes	Edgeworth Downes	119
The Patience of Frank van Wazer		
Is the Brainy Crook Extinct?	Edmund Richards	141

N E X T W E E K

The Crime at Red Towers

Was it, after all, Holden Dix's "perfect crime," whose scene is laid at Red Towers?

By Chester K. Steele

A serial in six parts, commencing in the next issue

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DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE EVERY WEEK

Vol. LIX

July 28, 1923

No. 4

Christopher B. Booth - *Student of Character*

Here is a newspaper man who has won success as a writer of fiction. Best known to readers of this magazine for his stories about the master confidence man, Mr. Clackworthy, and his amusing henchman, the Early Bird, this author shows his unusual talent for the more complicated and difficult task of constructing an ingenious mystery serial. It is entitled "House of Rogues," and the first installment appears in this issue.

ALl newspaper men do not necessarily make good writers of fiction. It is only where there is an inborn story-telling gift, plus a mastery of the technique of fiction writing, that the experience, training and opportunities of journalistic work prove of value. There are thousands of newspaper scribes all over the country who cannot write a piece of readable fiction to save their souls.

Christopher B. Booth is one of the few. Four years ago he was holding down a more or less routine job on a newspaper in the Middle West. Then, one night, while loitering in a Chicago café, he was introduced to the man who gave him the inspiration for his wonderfully successful series of yarns about the king of all confidence men, Mr. Clackworthy. Of imposing appearance, sartorially perfect, and endowed with an easy flow of imposing language, the con

man in real life needed only a few deft touches to convert him into the fiction character who has become such a favorite with readers of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE.

Young Booth wrote his first Clackworthy story shortly after this encounter and submitted it to us. We liked it and asked for more. Booth held on to his newspaper job and devoted his spare time to devising new adventures and exploits for Mr. Clackworthy and his amusing foil, The Early Bird. He kept this up for about a year and then, realizing that his talents lay in the fiction field, he resigned his newspaper job and came to New York to devote himself exclusively to writing stories.

Besides the always popular Clackworthy episodes, Booth has written a number of novelettes and short stories for us. His more serious work is characterized by a strong dramatic sense, tempered with a keen insight into human nature and his never-failing sense of humor. Among the most popular novelettes, from his pen, appearing in DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE during the past year, are: "The Mystery of the Empty Flat," in the issue of April 22, 1922; "The Burning Claw," published June 17, 1922; "With a Piece of Cord," published August 5, 1922; "The Smudge on the Door," published September 16, 1922; and "Trimmed to the Quick," published February 17, 1923.

For some months past, Booth has been spending a lot of his time out on Long Island, mostly along the south shore, and it is out there that he has laid the scenes of the serial which begins in this issue, "The House of Rogues."

Long Island abounds in picturesque countryside, with many quaint old houses, some dating back to Colonial days, nestling here and there among its wooded hills. The seafaring folk along the shores, too, furnish a number of interesting and sometimes amusing characters, and Booth, with his quick insight and unailing gift of delineation has used a few of them in working out his present story.

Those who know Christopher B. Booth only as the biographer of the oily Mr. Clackworthy will find this serial a revelation of his unusual abilities as a weaver of fascinating romantic mystery. "The House of Rogues" is a story filled with well-drawn human characters taken from real life, and it has a plot that will keep you guessing as to its secret down to the very last chapter. The first installment appears on the opposite page.



House of Rogues

By *Christopher B. Booth*

Author of "Mr. Clackworthy Takes a Dip in Ryé," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE FOX TAKES A PARTNER.

THERE was, despite the wrinkled, misshapen prison garb, something almost magnificent about the old man with the number "595" sewed to the breast of his gray shirt. Fifteen years of confinement had failed to crush his arresting personality, and his shoulders had not sagged beneath the weight of almost sixty years. Always silent, he now sat on the side of the iron cot, his somber eyes fixed meditatively upon his cell mate, studying him with careful appraisal.

The prison records recited that convict 595 had been committed under the name of Philip Reynard, that his offense against the Federal statutes had been counterfeiting the money of the United States, and that he had drawn a punishment of fifteen years' imprisonment. The fifteen years were almost up—just three days more to serve—and the nearness of his release accounted for Philip Reynard's interest in his cell mate.

A shifting of the prisoners two months before had brought these two men together without any choice of their own. Different in type and temperament, there had been companionship without comradeship; long days had passed with hardly more than monosyllables passing between them.

There was nothing magnificent about

"2002," Reynard's cell mate; he was short and stocky, with an undershot jaw. His age was perhaps thirty. Unaware of the old man's intent scrutiny, he was humming the tune of that still popular ballad, "The Sidewalks of New York." His release, too, was approaching; in fact, on the morrow he would be free again. Naturally he was in high spirits.

Philip Reynard continued his analytical gaze, making certain mental notes of his findings. He had decided that No. 2002—unknown to him by any other designation—was the sort willing to take a chance, that the fellow possessed a shrewd kind of intelligence, not-at first apparent; last, but not least, that he had nerve. All of these traits were for Reynard's purposes commendable.

His interest in his cell mate dated only from the day previous, when he had learned that only two days intervened between the dates of their respective release, and he needed a partner. He was aware that when he stepped forth into the outside world again he would be under constant surveillance, that the eyes of the secret-service men would be constantly upon him, eager to know if he had retained his old-time skill, ready to resume his criminal operations.

Reynard, except for a few hundred dollars, was penniless, and he was an old man. Even had not the lure of the old game tugged at him, there seemed nothing else that he could do. He

wanted money and he wanted it quickly; for Philip Reynard was a luxury-loving animal. In the passing of fifteen years his organization—those five men with whom he had surrounded himself—was shattered, scattered. Some of them were dead, and he had lost track of the others.

No. 2002 at last became aware of his companion's scrutiny and the hummed words, "East Side, West Side—all around the town" broke off into a growl.

"Say, grandpa, what's the idear of starin' a hole through a fella that a way?" he demanded indignantly. "Cut it out! Get me? Cut it out!"

Philip Reynard smiled slowly.

"Two months, my friend," he murmured, "we have occupied this same compartment, and we do not so much as know each other's names."

"That ain't my fault," grunted No. 2002. "I'm a chummy sort of a guy, but I seen you wanted to be let alone, so I let you alone."

Philip Reynard nodded.

"Yes," he admitted; "the fault has been mine. No doubt I have been very unsociable." His fingers touched a volume of Victor Hugo in the original French. "I have taken to living much with books. You are going out on Monday, I believe?"

No. 2002 grinned broadly and nodded vigorously.

"You've said it, grandpa; Monday'll see me breathin' the free ozone again—after eighteen months. It's gonna be good, gettin' back to the big town."

Reynard smiled tolerantly; under ordinary circumstances he might have rebuked this flippant "grandpa" address with a cold glance and withdrawn into his somber shell again, but he had a purpose in geniality.

"I am leaving Wednesday—after just ten times eighteen months," he said. "Fifteen years! Certainly, my friend, it is a coincidence that we, cell mates, are being released within the passing of just

a few hours. I have been thinking that we might take advantage of this coincidence, you and I."

"Don't you use the grand language," grunted No. 2002.

"Have you made any plans?"

"Now see here, grandpa; I ain't aimin' to hurt your feelin's, but if you're hintin' that you an' me is to hook up, there's nothin' doin'—strictly nothin' doin'. Speakin' frank an' overboard, as the sayin' goes, you're too old to travel my gait. When I takes a pal, he's gotta be a live un."

Reynard showed no resentment.

"Perhaps," he asked softly, "you've heard of 'The Fox'? Because he was black-haired and black-bearded they sometimes referred to him as—'The Black Fox'."

The other man frowned, searching his memory.

"Sort of seems like I've heard that name," he admitted.

"It has been some years since he operated," said Reynard. "You were in your teens then. Quite likely you have forgotten. I shall tell you something about him—The Black Fox. He was also known as 'The King of Counterfeiters.'"

No. 2002's eyes lighted.

"Yeah," he agreed, "I gotcha now. He was the bird that shoved the queer so long without gettin' nabbed."

"The Black Fox operated for eight years," nodded Reynard; "eight years without detection or a shadow of suspicion. During that time he manufactured and marketed hundreds of thousands in counterfeits so perfect that they were readily accepted by the banks; so perfect, my friend, that only the experts of the Treasury Department could tell them from the genuine."

"Yeah, I've heard that he was the best in the business. So he was that good, huh?"

"The secret of his success," proceeded Reynard, "lay in two things. His en-

graving plates were practically perfect, and he had been able to get possession of banknote paper in considerable quantity, that money paper with the silk threads running through it, which it is so hard to duplicate. His printing equipment was of the finest. He had established his plant in a remote section, where he lived the life of a gentleman recluse in his grand old house which——" His voice trailed off, and his eyes filmed with retrospection.

The other convict sensed that there was purpose behind this recital, and his interest was flamed into sudden eagerness.

"Spill it," he urged tersely.

"My name," the old man murmured softly, "is Reynard; since Reynard means fox, it was only natural that they should call me——"

"What?" gasped the other, his eyes bulging. "You ain't kiddin' me? On the level, are you——"

Reynard ran his fingers through his hair, now as white as cotton.

"I am he," he nodded; "I am The Black Fox. My hair was black then, but fifteen years is a long time—to spend in prison."

No. 2002 stared, speechless, not knowing if he should accept this statement at its face value, or put it down as a flight of fancy indulged in by an old man whose brain did him tricks. Reynard was still smiling.

"What is your name?" he inquired.

"Frank Padden's my right handle, but most of 'em calls me 'Three-finger Frank.' That's on account of the fin here." He held up for inspection his left hand with the middle finger missing—just a brief stub, where the finger had been amputated below the second joint.

"What brought you here, Padden? I have a reason for wanting to know."

Within the mind of Three-finger Frank there was a conflict between doubt and credulity, and credulity won.

"Mail-truck holdup," he answered humbly, somewhat abashed in the presence of such a celebrity as The Black Fox. "I was drivin' the taxi that the boys what done the job made their get-away in. I could have grabbed myself an immunity, but squealin' on a pal ain't my style. I wasn't built to be no snitch. Mebbe you seen about that stick-up in the papers—the one that was pulled off down by City Hall Square in the big town."

The Black Fox—only he might have been better called The White Fox—nodded, well pleased.

"Something tells me that you are the man I want," he said. "From the moment that the prison gates open for me on Wednesday I will be shadowed. The eyes of the government ferrets will be watching me. It might take me days, weeks, or months to escape this espionage, to lull their suspicions. I haven't enough money to bide my time; I must have quick action."

Three-finger leaned closer.

"You're goin' back into the old game again?" he demanded in a hoarse, excited whisper. "You're gonna cut me in on it?"

The Black Fox nodded.

"There are chances to be taken," he said; "if you're the sort I take you to be, and you want to take the chance for big stakes—yes."

Three-finger jerked his head in vigorous assent.

"Count me in, chief," he said huskily. "Let's hear the lay."

"Very well; listen to my instructions." And The Black Fox began to outline the plan in all of its precise detail.

CHAPTER II.

THE HOUSE WITH A PAST.

HOUSES have personality; some of them, true enough, are drab and uninteresting, architectural nonentities, like dull and commonplace people; but

there was something about the solemn bulk of the mansion presiding austere at the head of Pocket Cove which ensnared instant attention and intrigued a persistent curiosity.

The style of architecture made the place appear much more ancient than it was; at a little distance one would have thought it an abandoned ruin, left to neglect and decay. Moss and vines had claimed the stone exterior, and the stones themselves gave the effect of great age. Upon closer approach, however, this first impression of abandoned desolation was dispelled. The lawn was fresh with the touch of a capable landscape gardener. Crouching back of the house itself was a new three-car garage, with accommodations for the chauffeur and his family, if he happened to possess one. New walks had been laid, and, down by the shore, where the lawn dipped toward the cove, the private pier and the boathouse had been repaired with an almost lavish disregard for cost.

"It was apparent that 'The House of Rogues,' as the old place had been nicknamed in the village, had come into the hands of a rich owner who was occupying it as a summer residence. Perhaps it was a whim, the purchase of this queer house, which reminded one of a glum old hermit, but John Strawn had plenty of money to gratify his whims.

Although in New York, but a hundred miles away, a tortured humanity sweltered beneath a blanket of hot humidity, this section of Long Island, where the tapering finger of land points far out into the Atlantic, was cool with the fresh, tangy breath of the sea. It was evening, and The House of Rogues was ablaze with a prodigality of illumination. It didn't quite fit, a lighting plant here; it seemed that the house had been designed especially for the use of candles. Such a modern thing was an incongruity which no amount of electrical ingenuity could harmonize.

John Strawn, the new owner of the old house, and his guests were at dinner, the latter having arrived just before dusk. There was absent that careless, bon-vivant note which properly belongs to week-end parties; perhaps it was the almost cathedral atmosphere of the long, high dining room, with its walnut walls reaching up to the arched, carved ceiling of the same dark wood. It was a gorgeous, costly room, but a solemn one; the flat tone of it was broken only by the satiny gleam of the white tablecloth and the glitter of the silver, as it reflected the lights of the candelabrum, which had been modernized with electricity.

John Strawn was not just the figure that one would have selected for the high-backed, hand-carved chair at the head of the table, for one pictured in that seat a tall, august personage, grim and austere, like the house over which he ruled. While a very rich man, Strawn was not a "personage." Neither was he tall nor austere.

He was short and pudgy, John Strawn. At fifty-one, counting his wealth well into the seven figures, he had ceased the pursuit of money and was making a business of enjoying himself; already his face was beginning to wear the flabby brand of overfed idleness.

At Strawn's right was Polly Eastman, just entering her twenties. She was dark-eyed, but fair of hair and skin, that rather startling combination of blonde and brunette. The lights from the candelabrum flooded down upon her head, transmuting the fine-spun strands into the texture of gold.

Although entirely aware that Mrs. Westbury Eastman was throwing Polly at his head, Strawn felt no resentment. Polly was a pretty girl, a charming girl, and she had—youth. John Strawn had about made up his mind to marry her. Now he leaned toward her, smiling.

"You haven't told me, Polly," he said, "what you think of my house."

Polly Eastman was always a frank little person, a quality which often distressed her mother.

"It isn't a house; it's a tomb!" she exclaimed. "There is something so gloomy, shivery, and depressing about it."

Mrs. Westbury Eastman, fearing the slightest word that might offend this rich man for whom she was campaigning as a son-in-law, gave her daughter a look of stern reproof. She was a large, ample - bosomed, determined - looking woman.

"Nonsense!" she protested. "It's a wonderful old house, Mr. Strawn; a wonderful house. It must have cost a fortune." This last observation was by way of being an index to her character; to her mercenary mind anything costly was "wonderful." She lifted her lorgnette and stared crushingly at her daughter again.

Strawn laughed good-naturedly.

"Don't be afraid to be frank, Polly," he chuckled; "it's a trait that I admire. It is a solemn sort of a place, but I'm sorry you don't like it." His tone was so grave, so genuine with regret, that Mrs. Vera Kingslake, the third woman guest, gave a start and bit her lip.

Mrs. Kingslake, herself angling for John Strawn, had naturally been aware that Mrs. Eastman wanted Strawn as Polly's husband, but it had not seriously occurred to her that she had a serious rival. She was suddenly aware that her own plans were in danger, but she gave no outward sign of her perturbation. Dissimulation was an art she had mastered.

Paul Grimshaw, Strawn's nephew, was drinking his wine with just a suspicion of eagerness, as if he were too fond of it. He was a rather fallow young man, with a loose mouth, and he wore a smallish mustache, the tips waxed to tight, upturning points.

"I think that both Mrs. Eastman and Polly are right," he offered. "It is, in

its way, a wonderful old house, and it would take a great deal of money to replace it. But there is a gloomy atmosphere about it; this dining room, for example, is——"

"Like a church," broke in Mrs. Kingslake.

"Oh, come now!" laughed Grimshaw. "I'll bet money that you haven't been inside a church recently enough to have any vivid memories of the experience."

Mrs. Kingslake, a fascinating widow of thirty, was of the worldly type and not known to have any pronounced religious leanings. She laughed, too. "Just a figure of speech," she admitted, "but you'll have to admit that it's a terribly glum place for a lively dinner. It's as if the man who built the house looked upon eating as a solemn rite."

"A bit more of this," said Grimshaw, with a wink, as he touched the stem of his wineglass, "and we'll forget the solemn atmosphere. Great stuff, eh? Older than the house. Jagers, Uncle John's butler, found just one solitary case of it hidden away in the cellar."

"A perfectly wonderful house!" murmured Mrs. Eastman. "Such gorgeous furnishings, too!"

"The place took my fancy the minute I saw it," said John Strawn. "It had been vacant for quite a long time—fifteen years. I got it at quite a bargain. I don't mind saying what I paid for it—an even thirty thousand."

"How absurdly and ridiculously cheap!" gushed Mrs. Eastman. "What a bargain finder you are, Mr. Strawn. The furnishings alone are surely worth that."

Strawn nodded. "Of course I have had to replace some things, carpets, hangings, and furnishings of that sort, but I consider I got it cheap, even if I did spend a pretty penny in renovating. You see, the price of everything is fixed by the rule of supply and demand. It isn't a place that would appeal to every one."

"And not every one," spoke up Paul Grimshaw, "wants to live in a house that was once a crook's hang-out."

"What!" gasped Polly. "A—a crook's—hang-out?"

"How preposterous!" scoffed Polly's mother. "Of course Paul is joking."

"Perhaps 'hang-out' is too crude a word," smiled John Strawn, "but that's just what it amounts to. In the village they call this place of mine 'The House of Rogues.' A nickname as odd as the house itself, eh?"

"How deliciously shocking!" exclaimed Mrs. Kingslake. "I dearly love to hear about criminals."

"You'll have to hunt a long while," said Paul Grimshaw, "before you find anything in fiction that beats the career of the man who built this somber old house. Philip Reynard was one of those rare characters, a gentleman crook."

"You don't mean a real criminal?" demanded Poly.

"A crook," answered Strawn's nephew. "To my mind there's a difference. A criminal is any one who commits any sort of a felony. A man kills in anger; he's a criminal. But a crook is a persistent criminal, one who plays crime as a game. This Philip Reynard was a crook—a master crook. He built this strange old house with the proceeds of crime."

"A master criminal," affirmed John Strawn. "Down at the village I have gathered what facts I could regarding him. They called him The Black Fox."

"An obvious nickname, as his real name was Reynard," said Grimshaw; "but it was doubly earned since he had the cleverness and cunning of the vulpine species. Go ahead, Uncle John, and thrill 'em with the adventures of the founder of our House of Rogues."

"Do tell us," urged Mrs. Kingslake.

"I'm just dying to hear it, too," chimed in Polly.

Only Mrs. Eastman was silent; she was one of those persons who considered

it low taste to be interested in such cheap sensations. Her newspaper reading, for example, was confined entirely to the society page. She experienced a slight chill of horror that John Strawn should revel in the possession of a house with such a sinister past.

With the promise of a thrill, the atmosphere of depression, heightened by the gloomy loftiness of the dining room, was dissipated by that curiosity which most of us have for criminal things. Even honest folk have a strange tingle, as they harken to a recital of evil deeds, the gripping fascination of the unlawful.

"The Black Fox, as they called him," began John Strawn, "was a most unusual man. This house of his is evidence of that, proof that he had the tastes and the instincts of a gentleman. Just who he was, or where he came from, I have been unable to learn. When captured after about eight years of undetected operation as a counterfeiter, he refused to tell anything of his past.

"This house, the furnishings, the books in his library, all indicate French ancestry. It's my notion that he was the scapegrace son of some high-bred French family. I rather have the feeling that this house is the duplication of one dear to the mind of his youth. He tried for an ancient effect and achieved it.

"However this place served more than a sentimental purpose—a very practical purpose, in fact. Fifteen years ago this was a sparsely inhabited locality; such isolation made it an ideal place in which to operate a counterfeiting plant. Suspicion would not easily fall upon a country gentleman of such substance as a house of this character would seem to make him. And they say that The Black Fox had a grand air about him—one of those big, impressive men."

There was another person present at the Strawn dinner table who until now had remained silent. This was Bob Dol-

liver, Strawn's secretary. Belonging to a family well connected socially, Bob Dolliver had suddenly been faced with the necessity of making his own way in the world, and, lacking any business or professional training, he had been hard put to make a living. The situation had solved itself by his employment with Strawn. While his title was "secretary," his real work was the correction of the rich man's social faults—teaching him the art of conducting himself as a gentleman. In addition to paying him a salary, Strawn was teaching Dolliver the ways of the dollar and giving the young man a chance to make a little money.

Mrs. Westbury Eastman had formed a dislike for Bob Dolliver; she had sensed his interest in Polly, and Polly, she was fearfully aware, was just at that impressionable age when romance is spelled in capital letters. Dolliver was just the sort, athletic, good looking, that might appeal to a girl's fancy and overshadow her sense of responsibility in making "a good marriage."

"Why do you speak of Philip Reynard in the past tense, as if he were dead?" asked young Dolliver. "I see by the newspapers this morning that he is still very much alive, and that he is about to be released from the Federal penitentiary—to-morrow I believe it is!"

John Strawn's eyebrows shot up in an expression of surprise, and a low, almost soundless whistle escaped his lips.

"The devil you say!" he exclaimed. "I didn't see that. So he's about to be released from prison, is he?"

"I intended showing you the item, just a few brief lines, but it slipped my mind."

"Mark my words," spoke up Paul Grimshaw, "he'll get back into the counterfeiting game again. I've heard that it's like the drug habit—they can't quit."

Strawn stroked a blunt forefinger up and down along the bridge of his nose for a moment, a characteristically meditative habit of his.

"And you mark me," he said slowly; "we'll have a visit from The Black Fox."

"No!" cried Mrs. Westbury Eastman with a horrified gasp. "That—that criminal wouldn't dare to come here!"

"Oh, how thrilling!" murmured Mrs. Kingslake.

"Yep," insisted Strawn, "he'll visit us—soon. My nephew is right; once a counterfeiter, always a counterfeiter. The Black Fox will come back to The House of Rogues! Hope he does; I've taken a keen interest in the unusual chap, and I'd like to meet him."

"You mean," questioned Polly, "that he'll be drawn back here on account of his affection for his old house?"

John Strawn shook his head.

"No, that isn't what will bring him," he answered. "Of course he'll no doubt have an affection for the place, for the house was his delight and his hobby, but what he'll come back for is something else." He smiled shrewdly and indulged in a dramatic pause.

"He'll probably murder us in our beds!" wailed Mrs. Westbury Eastman, for to her mind a crook was a murderous outlaw who would stop at nothing.

"Oh, don't be so silly, mother," remonstrated Polly. "Hasn't Paul assured us that he is a gentleman crook. If that's so, at least we women are safe." And she gave a brief, musical laugh.

"Reynard isn't a killer, Mrs. Eastman," reassured Paul Grimshaw; "have no fears on that score. Although armed, he submitted to capture without shooting it out, although he might have won his freedom by killing his captor. There was a queer thing about that—the circumstances of his capture, I mean."

"The government detectives got on his trail through a lucky fluke—just how I don't know—and the secret-service men descended upon him in a regular squadron. They surrounded the house here, certain that they had him inside; they broke in the doors only to find

the house empty. The Black Fox and two confederates, who posed as his servants; and who doubtless also served in that capacity, had simply vanished."

"They got out of a secret passage!" cried Mrs. Kingslake.

John Strawn smiled.

"That would be a natural conclusion," he chuckled, "but the carpenters I've had working on the house say not. They've tapped walls and all that sort of business, and I can positively assure you that there are no sliding panels, and that neither of the two fireplaces are on hinges. No, The Black Fox was just too cunning for them, that's all; he must have got out of the house in a perfectly natural way and slipped by their guard. He was taken in New York a week later, as he was trying to engage passage on a steamer. That's where he made a mistake. All criminals, even the cleverest of them, do make mistakes; he should have stayed under cover for a while."

"But, Uncle John," pressed Grimshaw, "what makes you so sure that we're going to have a visit from Reynard when he is released from prison?"

"Because there's something in this house that he wants," answered Strawn. "Something that I found this afternoon, while I was nosing about that private sanctuary of his on the second floor. It will be more interesting if you see it for yourself. I'll show you after dinner—the reason why The Black Fox will come back."

CHAPTER III.

THE FIFTY-DOLLAR PLATES.

WITH all the delight of a dramatist leading his audience toward the climax, John Strawn escorted his guests, the moment they left the dining room, up the broad staircase to the second floor. Mrs. Westbury Eastman, realizing the pride that he took in the place and his genuine delight in that low person called The Black Fox, managed to simulate

some show of interest. It was not necessary for the others to pretend; their interest was genuine, and their curiosity was heated to fever pitch by Strawn's staging of suspense. Evan Paul Grimshaw, the rich man's nephew, was in ignorance of the surprise that lay in wait in the room above.

"It's just like going to one of those mystery plays that have been having such a vogue in New York," said Mrs. Kingslake. "There is one I saw where the audience becomes a part of the cast; there were policemen—not real policemen, of course—patrolling the aisles, and it was quite thrilling."

"Did you know that this was a—a crook's hang-out, as Paul calls it, when you bought it?" Polly asked Strawn, as they reached the first landing.

John Strawn chuckled and nodded.

"Yes, I knew that when I bought it," he answered. "Not until I had become interested in the place, however, and made some inquiries at the office of the real-estate broker. Honest chap, that broker; wouldn't fix a price until he had told me the history of The House of Rogues. The place's past didn't sour me on the purchase of it; rather increased my interest in it, as a matter of fact.

"You see, Reynard mortgaged the house, after his arrest, to get the money for his lawyers who defended him at his trial. Simply throwing money away; the government had him cold. The mortgagees had to take the property, and they hadn't been able to get it off their hands. There, Polly, you have the whole story." His voice lowered, as he added gravely: "I am very sorry, child, that you don't like my house; I am very sorry indeed. I had rather liked the idea of spending the summers out here at Pocket Cove."

His tone carried a subtle hint of what was in his mind. Polly would have been a very dull young person had she not been aware of her mother's match-mak-

ing designs, but it had not seriously occurred to her that the plan would succeed. She realized now that there was every chance it would, and the prospect she found just a little terrifying.

"Perhaps—perhaps it wouldn't be so bad—after one got accustomed to it," she said faintly, with a jerky laugh, and her hand dropped to the stairway rail. Bob Dolliver, coming behind her, accidentally touched his fingers against hers, and there was something electric to both of them in this brief touch. The girl's face flushed.

Mrs. Kingslake's quick eyes did not miss much that went on before her; she was a clever woman, Vera Kingslake, and she decided, in a sudden grim determination, to use her brains. She did not intend placidly to lose this matrimonial competition to a mere chit of a girl who had neither the poise of maturity, nor her own worldly vivacity; only that precious asset, youth.

Mrs. Eastman, having caught Strawn's remark and her daughter's answer, felt an inward glow of satisfaction; Polly was responding with more good sense than she had really expected.

The six had reached the second floor.

"Lead on, Uncle John," bantered Paul Grimshaw. "It would be in keeping with that good luck of yours for The Black Fox to have left behind him a pocketful of diamonds and rubies—or another case of that wine Jagers found in the cellar."

Strawn paused at the first door to the right down the wide, gloomily lighted hall. As his hand touched the knob, Polly gave voice to a stifled gasp.

"Sh!" she whispered. "I think there's some one in there. I heard——"

"The servants are all downstairs," said Paul Grimshaw; "it must be your imagination, Polly."

"I didn't hear anything; but then my hearing isn't very acute," said Strawn.

"Well, I thought I heard something, too," offered Mrs. Kingslake, "but I sup-

pose an old house like this is full of strange creaks. If The Black Fox were dead now——"

She broke off the jesting suggestion, as John Strawn flung open the door, and the dim light from the hallway filtered in among the deeper shadows of the room. Strawn, rather amused and commenting mentally upon the power of the imagination, strode within and snapped on a light. The chamber was empty.

Polly laughed at her own expense as she blinked at the sudden flood of illumination. The windows were closed, the shades down, and there was but one door, that which they had just entered. It was a large room, the walls fitted with built-in bookcases, except for a space at the end, where there was a large, old-fashioned safe, one of those cumbersome, formidable affairs rising to a height of something like five feet. With all those books, what an inveterate reader Philip Reynard must have been!

There was a long, black-wooded table, with deeply carved legs, and only one chair. Just one chair in all this big room; perhaps not so strange when one considered that here was the place where Reynard liked to be alone. There had been necessity for but one chair, since here he wanted only the company of his beloved books.

"How dirty everything is in here!" exclaimed Mrs. Kingslake, touching the edge of the dust-coated table and thereafter vigorously scrubbing at her fingers with her lacy handkerchief.

John Strawn looked apologetic.

"Somehow," he explained, "I didn't have the heart to have this room done over. I've left it as it was. Perhaps a foolish piece of sentiment, but—well, I believe I called this Reynard's sanctuary. I think that's the right word for it. Somehow I put off doing anything to this room."

Polly liked John Strawn better for this "foolish piece of sentiment."

"This wasn't where he made his counterfeit money?" asked Mrs. Westbury Eastman. "How do they go about making counterfeit money, anyhow?"

"Oh, no, this wasn't the money factory," spoke up Paul Grimshaw. "He had a regular engraving and printing plant in the cellar—the best-equipped plant that the secret service have ever put hands on, I understand. Of course it isn't there now; it was seized by the government and hauled off."

"But he kept his plates in that safe, didn't I understand you to say, Mr. Strawn?" said Bob Dolliver, pointing to the big iron affair at the end of the room.

"Yes," nodded Strawn, "that's right. The government men managed to get the safe open, I'm told, and found quite an elaborate collection of plates and bank-note paper, only they overlooked—what I've brought you up here to show you. It's a discovery I made while I was musing over some of these old books of Reynard."

"Plates?" questioned Mrs. Kingslake. "What are these plates that you keep talking about?"

"Engraving plates," explained Bob Dolliver. "I don't know that I'm qualified to explain the engraving process in all of its technical detail, but the engraver etches out a design with his fine tools, and those are the designs which are printed upon paper and makes them money. It's very careful and difficult work; I've heard that it takes weeks and months. The difference of one micrometer in a line may spoil the whole job."

"How interesting," Polly murmured absently; she was thinking not so much of what Dolliver said, as the way his hand had trembled when his fingers had touched hers on the stairway, and of the nerve tingle that she had herself experienced.

John Strawn had gone to the bookshelves on the east wall.

"I am about to show you the reason why The Black Fox will come back," he said, reaching up to the shelf that was just level with his face. "I hadn't considered the possibility of his return until that remark of Paul during dinner, but I am certain of it now. I am satisfied that he placed here the things which I am about to show you, with the expectation of coming back." He reached up and brought down a six-volume set of Gibbon's "Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire;" there followed Cervantes' "Don Quixote" in the original Spanish text. Presently a good two feet of the shelf was cleared. He reached his hand into the now open space, as his fingers sought what appeared to be a nail head. There was a click, the back of the bookcase became a removable board which came free, revealing a shallow depression in the wall which served as a hidden compartment.

"How thrilling!" cried Mrs. Kingslake. "What's hidden away in that cunning little place?"

"This," answered Strawn, holding in his two hands two packages. "Here are the engraved plates for fifty-dollar counterfeit treasury certificates; this other little bundle contains enough bank-note paper to print two thousand bogus bills."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Bob Dolliver. "The makings of a hundred thousand dollars in counterfeit money!"

"Exactly," nodded Strawn. "And The Black Fox can make it into spurious money that'll be good enough to slip past almost any bank."

Mrs. Eastman looked apprehensive.

"Those criminals would kill every last one of us for a hundred thousand dollars!" she moaned. "I know that something's going to happen; I just know that something terrible is going to happen!"

"Nonsense, Mrs. Eastman," soothed John Strawn; "there's nothing that can happen. Reynard will probably come back with the hope of finding the house

still unoccupied. My guess is that, when he finds me established in The House of Rogues, he'll think up some clever, but peaceable, pretext of getting into this room and putting his hands on his precious property.

"Like Dolliver, I don't know a lot about engraving, but these seem like a mighty good piece of work to me. Want a look at 'em, folks?" He removed the wrapping of oiled paper and offered the counterfeiter's plates for inspection.

"Then it's your theory," asked Bob Dolliver, "that the plates were left behind those books deliberately?"

"Yes, that's the way I've got it figured out. He left behind other plates—those of bills for smaller denomination because the secret service had the goods on him anyhow, because they would probably have torn the house apart in an effort to find them, knowing that he must have them. Naturally, when they opened the safe there and found the other plates, they stopped looking any further. Anyhow that's how I've got it figured out. He didn't take them with him for, if he were captured, and which he was, he would lose them."

"What are you going to do with them?" asked Polly.

"For the present," smiled Strawn, "I'll let them stay where I found them, but I shall take them into town with me the first time I go and turn them over to the Federal authorities. It's a criminal offense to have them in one's possession, you know."

Paul Grimshaw shook his head.

"I don't believe I'd leave that stuff here, Uncle John," he demurred. "Taking it for granted that The Black Fox may come back, he knows where he left the things, and he might outwit you and get hold of them. I believe I'd find a safer place for them. You don't want, by any act of carelessness, to become an unconscious confederate and put the stuff into his hands."

"Perhaps you're right, Paul," nodded

Strawn. "Anyhow we'll play safe and get another hiding place. For, mark my words, The Black Fox will visit us; he'll come back to The House of Rogues just as fast as a train can carry him here from the prison in Atlanta."

Mrs. Westbury Eastman shivered; this lacked a great deal of being her idea of an enjoyable house party.

CHAPTER IV.

A WOMAN SCHEMES.

WITH evening it had become chilly enough to justify a blazing log in the wide fireplace of the enormous living room, although it was August, and the thermometer registered ninety-three in New York, a hundred miles away. Jagers, the butler, was replenishing the fire, as Strawn, carrying the counterfeiting plates and the bundle of bank-note paper, which at Paul Grimshaw's suggestion he had decided to remove from the book-walled room on the second floor, and his party came down.

Jagers was an oddity, a caricature of a man; his head was large and dome-like and seemed constantly in peril of falling loose from his thin body, so slender was his neck. His large, faint-blue eyes were slightly protruding. He might have been an eccentric character made up for the stage.

"What a strange creature," said Mrs. Kingslake, as Jagers, bowing, his hands held against his body level with his elbows, quitted the room. "One would think, Mr. Strawn, that you looked about until you could find a servant to match your house in queeriness."

Strawn occupied a chair where he could watch the flashes from the fire do tricks with Polly's hair. He took a cigar from his pocket and lighted it before answering.

"No," he said, "Jagers didn't have to be sought. Like the case of wine and the counterfeiting plates, he came with the house."

"Merciful Heaven!" gasped Mrs. Westbury Eastman. "You don't mean that this servant of yours is one of that horrible Black Fox's—er—gang?"

"Hardly that," laughed Strawn. "He's been the caretaker for the past two years or so. For a great many years the house was untended, but when the new realty brokers became the agents for the property they took precautions against vandals—especially as there had been an epidemic of summer-home invasions in this section. Jagers got the job as caretaker; he begged so hard to stay that I took him on as a butler. And I'll say that, for a fellow who was never a butler, he gets away with it in a neat fashion."

"You're rather a softy, aren't you, Mr. Strawn?" said Polly. "I imagined that all successful business men developed into hard, flint-hearted persons."

John Strawn flicked the ash from his cigar.

"I've been called a hard man," he said; "most men in business have to be hard at times, but I think there's a human streak in me. It's cropping out more and more, as I relax the old-time tension." He grinned toward his nephew. "I'm even learning to forgive Paul for his recklessness and his idleness."

Paul flushed with a surge of suppressed anger, considering this reference to himself a bit of brutal and uncalled-for frankness. He moved away from the fireplace, where he had been standing, and crossed to the far end of the room where, without any particular premeditation, he sat down beside Vera Kingslake, muttering some unintelligible words under his breath.

"It is a little disgusting, isn't it?" murmured Mrs. Kingslake. "Poor Paul, I know just the way you feel."

Paul Grimshaw looked up slowly.

"Just what do you mean is disgusting?" he asked.

"The way your uncle is letting himself walk into that designing woman's

trap—what else?" She inclined her head toward Mrs. Westbury Eastman. "It's been perfectly apparent that the scheming woman has been throwing the girl straight at him. The amazing part of it—"

"Polly's a pretty girl," Paul interrupted gloomily. "Too young for Uncle John, though; it'll be the devil of a bad go, I'm afraid."

"And rather rough on you," murmured Vera Kingslake. "You'll no longer be your uncle's heir if he marries."

Paul nodded glumly.

"I'd just been thinking of that," he admitted. "He's tried to like me because I'm the only kin he has, but I seem to be a bitter pill for him to swallow. If he married—"

"It's a shame!" the widow whispered tensely. "If Polly really cared anything about him there might be some excuse, but if she marries him it will only be because she's being driven into it by her mother and against her own wishes. It's quite apparent to me that she's really quite fond of Bob Dolliver."

"Wouldn't be surprised," nodded Paul, still morosely; "Bob's a fine chap, a regular fellow."

"But just supine enough to keep his mouth closed and his hands in his pocket, while your aging Uncle John marries the girl he loves. If I knew Bob Dolliver better I'd give him a good talking to. I don't suppose that you'd want to—ah—stir him up a little; perhaps it wouldn't be just the proper thing."

She paused, nodding sagely.

Crafty Vera Kingslake! She had suggested that Paul Grimshaw do something to further his own interests in the guise of doing a favor to young Dolliver. So shrewd was she at concealing her own feelings that her cat's-paw did not for a moment suspect that she had any ulterior motive, that she was trying to promote a romance between Polly and Bob in an effort to break up

the girl's threatened match with John Strawn.

Strawn, she felt sure, was in a marrying state of mind; he had been a bachelor for fifty-one years, too busy with making money to bother with a wife, and now he felt that there was something missing from his life. Having made up her mind to marry John Strawn herself, Vera Kinslake was the sort who preferred to see the man remain single than for any one else to get him.

Paul Grimshaw snapped at the bait, with all the avidity of a hungry trout.

"I wouldn't mind giving Bob a little push," he said quickly; "in fact I believe I will encourage him a little. It can't do any harm, only"—he hesitated—"he may think that I am selfish in my own interest, that I'm wanting him to win Polly so that Uncle John won't marry her and thus ruin my chances of coming into Uncle John's fortune."

"I shouldn't worry about that if I were you," Mrs. Kingslake answered silkily. "I wouldn't worry about that in the least." She touched her handkerchief to her mouth, masking a satisfied little smile. She had won herself an ally, and she intended doing a little missionary work herself—with Polly.

Paul's opportunity to give Bob Dolliver "a little push" came sooner than he had expected, and with greater consequences than he would have thought possible, if he had stopped to consider consequences, which he did not.

At the other end of the room, by the fire, John Strawn was still talking about The House of Rogues; there seemed to be no end of the subject with him. Mrs. Eastman and Polly were listening, both of them beginning to be a little weary of it. The counterfeiting plates and the package of bank-note paper rested on the floor beside Strawn's chair.

"If you don't mind, Dolliver," said Strawn, reaching down for them, "I'll

have you take these articles upstairs and put them in the desk of my study. I should have done it while I was up there. I'm going to take Polly and her mother down into the lower regions and show 'em the place where The Black Fox had his money factory."

"I'd love to see that," agreed Polly rather half-heartedly; she was thinking that there was a suspicion of puffy pouches beneath John Strawn's eyes, and that his mouth was a little coarse. A woman can not help but look critically at the man whom she is considering as a husband. What a difference there was between him and—well, Bob Dolliver.

"You run along, Polly," said Mrs. Westbury Eastman with a smug little smile; "I don't think I'll go."

"Oh the money factory!" exclaimed Mrs. Kingslake. "Yes, we must see that. Put it Strawn and Polly out of her sight? Not for a single moment, if she could contrive to be present!

"Surely," urged Polly, "you must come along, Mrs. Kingslake."

"Of course," nodded Strawn; "you were included in my little expedition." But, as a matter of fact, he had forgotten her presence for the moment.

Bob Dolliver picked up the counterfeiting plates and the other package, making his way toward the stairway in the reception hall.

"I shall go along after all," decided Mrs. Eastman.

"Not I," said Paul Grimshaw. "I've been over every foot of that cellar. I'll stay here." A moment or so later he was alone; he moved over to the fire, lighted a cigarette and watched the tiny ribbon of smoke, as it was drawn toward the chimney.

"If he marries her," he mused bitterly, "he'll probably kick me out—cold. It isn't fair; I'm the only relative he's got in the world!"

Bob Dolliver, having finished his errand to the study, came back, and Paul turned impulsively.

"Come over here, Bob, and sit down," he said. "I—er—I hope you're not going to mind if I butt into what you consider strictly your own private affair. You—eh—you're quite fond of Polly, aren't you?"

Bob Dolliver's head jerked up, and a flush spread over his face.

"Oh, I know it sounds impertinent as the very devil, Bob, but, confound it, I'm going to get this off my chest. I think a good deal of you, old man, and have noticed Uncle John's attitude toward Polly?"

"I don't think we'll discuss the matter, Paul," Dolliver said quietly.

"Yes, we will," the other insisted. "Let's call things by their right names. Polly's mother is a fortune hunter; old Caleb Eastman didn't leave them a whole lot, and Mrs. Eastman's been spending it pretty fast—too fast for it to last. She's determined that Polly shall marry money, and Uncle John has it."

"Stop it!" ordered Dolliver. "No matter what her mother wants, Polly isn't the sort of girl who would——"

"Oh, wouldn't she? Perhaps she wouldn't if the right man dipped in his oar, but I'll bet a five-dollar bill to a German mark that you haven't opened your mouth to her. What's the girl to think—that you don't want her?"

"See here, Paul, you mean well, but I think we won't let this talk go any further. No matter how I feel"—his hands went out in a hopeless gesture, and his face in the light from the fire was drawn and haggard—"I am dirt poor. I haven't money enough to——"

"So that's it, eh? Pride! A funny kind of a pride, I'd say, if you really care anything about her. Polly is twenty—or, is it only nineteen—and Uncle John is past fifty. Do you think he'll ever make her happy? Do you think that a few pretty little baubles, a few strings of pearls will be all that will be necessary to make her happy?"

"Polly's got grit; she's the sort that

would go through fire for a man if she cared enough for him. A little thoroughbred, that girl, Bob. It'll be a rum go for her, being married to Uncle John; you know as well as I do that under the surface of his geniality he's hard as nails, and that he's got the devil of a temper. If he ever flew into one of those rages of his——"

Bob Dolliver's hands clenched.

"Stop it, Paul; in Heaven's name, stop it!" he muttered hoarsely. "Don't you suppose that I've seen what's been going on? But I never thought for a moment that Polly would—would——"

"Let herself be auctioned off by her mother to the highest bidder," grunted Paul Grimshaw. "Well, she wouldn't if you declared yourself—let her know how you feel about things. No doubt her mother is nagging her day and night, pushing her into the thing. Polly's young, and her mother's domineering, relentless. Unless I miss my guess, the engagement will be announced before the week-end is over—unless you get busy and do a little love-making yourself."

* There fell a brief silence. Bob Dolliver's hands were still clenched, and his face was set into haggard lines. So softly that neither of the men by the open fire heard his footfall, John Strawn came in from out of the hallway. His face was in the shadows.

"Dolliver," he said quietly, "I find that the door to the cellar stairs is locked. Will you find Jagers for me, if you please?"

Bob turned with a start, tried to compose himself, and without response went to obey his employer's request. When he had gone, John Strawn closed the door and advanced across the room. Paul Grimshaw's sallow face mottled; there was something ominous in his uncle's approach.

Alone, John Strawn was no longer the affable, genial host of the evening; his flabby cheeks, as he loosened control

of his anger, were livid. His mouth parted into a snarling grimace.

"You contemptible pup!" he rasped. "You underhanded, ungrateful whelp! I ought to kick you out of the house."

"I—Uncle John, I—" His jaw moved helplessly, as the words failed.

"Don't waste any time with lies and explanations," snapped Strawn. "I heard the conversation. The motive for your advice to my secretary is quite clear—curse your greedy, money-hungry soul! 'If Uncle John remains unmarried, I am his only legal heir; he'll have to leave me his money.' That's the way you reasoned. You grasping, spend-thrift idler, you parasite! I wish to Heaven that I'd left you in the poverty where I found you.

"You've cooked your own goose, my cunning, scheming nephew; you've not only cooked it—you've burned it to a cinder. I'm through with you—through, and you know what that means."

"You're going to—to kick me out?" faltered Paul.

"That's it," grunted John Strawn with a gloating satisfaction; "you've said it. I won't disrupt the house party with a family row; you can stay until Monday—if you can swallow my food without it choking you." His voice took on a sarcastic inflection. "Perhaps you will enjoy staying to offer your congratulations to the—future Mrs. Strawn!"

Paul Grimshaw sank back heavily into the chair, the room swimming drunkenly before him. Disinherited—kicked out without a dollar. Under his breath he cursed Vera Kingslake for making the suggestion that had got him into this fix.

CHAPTER V.

THE PRINT OF A HAND.

JOHN STRAWN had become a past master in that difficult art of concealing mental stress. He assumed his good-natured urbanity and, when he again joined Mrs. Eastman, Polly, and

Vera Kingslake at the cellar stairs, his face gave no evidence of the unpleasant scene that had just passed between himself and Paul.

Bob Dolliver had got the keys from Jagers and had thus unintentionally joined the little group set out to explore the lower regions of the house, the place where The Fox had executed bogus currency to the amount of hundreds of thousands. Strawn took the key from Bob and unlocked the door.

"Don't worry about dust or cobwebs," laughed the master of the house. "You'll find the place clean as a new whistle." He snapped on a light. "And there'll be no shadows for lurking 'haints,' you see."

"It would have been much more thrilling by candlelight," said Mrs. Kingslake, "but, at that, I think I like it better this way."

In the light of the glamour that John Strawn had woven about the "money factory," Polly was somewhat disappointed and said so.

"I expected to find secret rooms and all that sort of thing," she complained, as, reaching the end of the basement, she saw only a room cut off from the rest of the space by a stone partition and an ordinary-looking door. Within this room there were some work tables and nothing else; every article used in counterfeiting had been seized by the government men, as evidence, fifteen years before.

"There was really no good in secret rooms," answered Strawn, "for the moment that The Black Fox fell under suspicion, he was through. His long success was that he did avoid suspicion. When the raid came it was so swift that he had no time to destroy his printing and engraving plant."

Crash! Ten feet away a loose board, leaning endwise against an upturned box, clattered to the floor with almost the violence of an explosion.

"Oh!" screamed Mrs. Eastman and

groped weakly for the support of the wall. Even John Strawn for a moment was startled out of his calm, and Polly clung to Bob Dolliver's arm, pressing close to him. A quiver went through Bob; it was not fear, but her electrifying nearness.

"Some one is behind that box!" whispered Vera Kingslake. There was a rustle of paper and a gray streak sped across the brick floor.

"A rat!" grunted Strawn. "Don't be alarmed, ladies! It's only a rat."

"Only—only—a rat!" moaned Mrs. Eastman. "Take—take me out of this horrible place." She might have even preferred The Black Fox. "I know that I shan't sleep a wink this night."

"I—I'm not wild about rats," said Polly. "The cellar has given us our thrill, and I think I'll go to bed." Her fingers released their clutch about Bob's sleeve, and, as she looked up at him with a brief, tremulous little smile, Bob gulped. John Strawn scowled slightly; he made up his mind that he would propose to Polly at the first opportunity, and that he would make that opportunity in the morning.

The five retraced their steps to the stairs. Strawn suggested that they tarry to have a good-night cocktail and listen to the radio that he had installed for evening diversion, but Mrs. Eastman seconded her daughter's suggestion about retiring. Thus they all decided to turn in, and it was Polly who took the lead up the steps to the second floor; she seemed just a little anxious to get off by herself.

It might have been an apprehensive state of mind, superinduced by the moment of fright in the cellar, but she paused in front of the closed door of the book-walled room, wherein had been found The Black Fox's counterfeiting plates. Perhaps that sound which she had been so sure of hearing in this room had likewise been the scurrying of a rat. She listened; either she actually

heard it, or it was a trick of the imagination; but on the other side of the door there was a faint thump, as of a body jarring against a piece of furniture. If her ears deceived her, then so did her eyes, for a slender pencil of light darted through the keyhole of the lock and was gone, as if a pocket flash lamp had been turned toward the door.

Polly checked the cry which rose in her throat; once there had been a laugh at her expense, and she didn't propose to let herself be accused of indulging in further fancies. Yet she had been very sure. Her hand went to the knob; slowly, almost unwillingly, she turned it very quietly, almost soundlessly. The heavy door swung back two inches, then four, and her face bent toward the cautiously widening space.

It was dark; she saw nothing, but that vague sixth sense, which tells us of another presence, warned her that in the blackness before her there was some silent, but living, thing. She was almost certain that she could hear strained breathing. Frantically she jerked the door shut, her hands clung to the knob, as if to thwart an effort of that thing to break through upon her. She did not scream; her throat was paralyzed. She could not even call to Strawn or Bob Dolliver, who were approaching up the stairway.

Bob Dolliver saw her first; her slim form was silhouetted in the gloom, as her body strained bracingly at the door. He darted forward and, coming nearer, saw the look of terror on her face.

"Polly! What's wrong?"

His presence relieved the fear-stricken tension; the girl's arms swung limply to her sides, and she staggered back with a half sob in her throat.

"This—this time," she whispered, "I'm not mistaken. There—there's some one in that room. There—there was a light through the keyhole; and I heard—some one moving."

"I think it must be your nerves," said

Bob; "Strawn shouldn't have taken you into that rat-populated cellar."

"There's some one in that room!" cried Polly again, her voice rising to a louder pitch.

"What's this?" laughed John Strawn. "Are you hearing noises again, child?"

"There's some one in that room," Polly insisted for the third time. "If you don't believe it, open the door."

Dolliver instantly acted upon this suggestion and, with a quick sweep of his arm, flung the door wide.

"Careful!" bantered Vera Kingslake. "The goblins'll get you!"

"Where the devil is that light?" demanded Bob, plunging forward.

"Here it is, on the wall," said Strawn from behind, as he pushed the button of the switch. The incandescent bulbs burst into a flood of light and disclosed the room—empty!

"Polly, I'm ashamed of you!" snapped her mother. "Haven't we had enough of fright for one night without you—"

"I tell you that there was some one in this room!" cried Polly, her voice trembling. Instead of being calmed by the evidence that she had been wrong, the mystery of it only served to increase her terror. "I am not mistaken; I know that I'm not mistaken."

"Stuff and nonsense!" scoffed Vera Kingslake. "If there had been any one in the room they'd still be here. There isn't but one door, the one you were standing in front of."

"It makes no difference," declared Polly. "I know what I saw and heard—and felt. I opened the door and—"

"You saw some one?" demanded Strawn.

"N-no, I didn't see any one; it was too dark to see anything, but I felt a presence."

"Rubbish!" derided Mrs. Kingslake.

"Yes, I know what you mean," nodded Bob. "One night I woke up with the feeling that there was some one in the

room with me. I listened, but there wasn't a sound. Then, when I snapped on the light, I found myself staring into the bore of a mighty wicked-looking little gun held in the hand of a mighty wicked-looking man who'd called on me to take what he could find. Oh, yes, there's such a sensation as that, but—"

He could get no further.

"But there's no one here," interrupted Strawn with a smile; "that rather seems to settle the argument about it."

"I—I know that I wasn't mistaken," Polly insisted, becoming a trifle hysterical. "There was a light through the keyhole; that was something I saw with my eyes. I couldn't very well imagine that."

"How about the windows?" suggested Bob Dolliver.

"Fastened, I think you'll find," answered Strawn, striding across the room. "Yes, you can see for yourself; the catches are turned tight." Experimentally he released the fastenings, trying each window in turn. Both of them came up grudgingly, with a plaintive whine and shriek of binding wood. "Even with the catches unfastened, she would have heard that racket."

Polly stared about the room, her eyes searching for some hidden recess which might afford a hiding place.

"The safe!" she exclaimed in sudden inspiration. "It's big enough for a man to crouch into. Look in that safe!"

"There may be something in that!" cried Dolliver. "And Polly is so sure that I can't believe—"

Strawn stared at the safe critically and nodded. "It's big enough," he agreed, "and, as it happens, the safe door is unlocked." Here he lowered his voice. "Not so loud; I am not so sure but that, if there is any one in there, he couldn't hear us talking, and he might be armed. I don't happen to own a gun, and—well, what's the use in taking chances?"

On the table was a heavy candlestick, and Bob Dolliver felt the weight of it.

"This will do," he murmured grimly. "I'll stand a little to one side, while you, Strawn, open the door. I can crown him, as he comes out, before he gets a chance to shoot." He took a place beside the safe, holding the candlestick upraised.

Paul Grimshaw, coming up the stairs, looked in the door, amazed by this strange scene. His breath carried with him the evidence that he had sought solace in liquor, following the scene with his uncle.

"What's this?" he muttered thickly, taking a slightly unsteady step into the room. No one paid any attention to him.

"What a silly lot of fuss you're making over nothing!" laughed Vera Kingslake. "There's no one in that safe."

John Strawn seized the knob of the safe, and Polly noticed that he stood in a position where he would be protectingly behind it; the heavy metal door swung out with a slow sweep. The safe, like the room, was empty!

A chorus of nervous laughter followed, but Polly did not join in; she stuck stubbornly to her belief that there had been some one in the room at the moment she had stood outside the door in the hall.

"Then there must be some—some secret entrance," she insisted. "If it had

been just noises, I'd back down, but I tell you that I saw a light shining through the keyhole!"

John Strawn shook his head.

"Nothing doing on that," he chuckled; "as I told you, my carpenters have been over the house thoroughly. These book-cases are built in solid, and——"

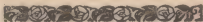
"Look!" whispered Vera Kingslake. Her eyes had widened, and her finger, pointing to the table in the center of the room, was trembling. "That—that wasn't there when we were in this room earlier this evening. I'll swear that it wasn't! Polly was right after all! There—there's some one been in this room."

In the thickly coated dust of the table there stood out with vivid distinctness the outline of a man's hand. It was a big hand. The others pressed closer, staring at it.

"I know it wasn't there two hours ago," declared Mrs. Kingslake. "See, the thumb touches the marks where I rested my fingers on the table when we were in here before. I looked at the table, and I know that it wasn't there then."

"That," said Dolliver, "was made by a man with only three fingers." He was right; the imprint in the thick dust showed the middle finger missing, just below the second joint!

To be continued in next week's issue of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE.



POLICE CHIEF PRISONER IN HIS OWN JAIL

THE little community of Chillicothe, Illinois, recently woke up to find their entire police force locked up in the village jail. Two negro bandits locked up the chief of police in his own jail and then incarcerated the entire police force and all the village officials. Taking the chief's badge, they then proceeded to rob every business house in the community.

John Merritt was the unfortunate chief who suffered the shame of having his badge snatched from his uniform and was submitted to the humiliation of being thrown into his own prison, along with two of his prisoners. The bandits also locked up the village marshal, the postmaster, water and sewer inspector, the supervisor of parks, and the custodian of village property. The bandits then made a raid on the business houses and secured a large amount of loot.

Ten Jumps Ahead

By *Paul Ellsworth Triem*

Author of "Under the Rays of the Red Star," etc.

IN her day Mother Hanson had been the able assistant of internationally known confidence men. Now they were gone; and the old woman sat grimly behind the cigar counter in her little restaurant, munching eternally at caraway seeds and sneering at the younger generation of crooks. But she had made Mother Hanson's Kitchen a Mecca for them, and here came Jimmy, the Greek, and others of his kind to talk "shop."

Occasionally others than thieves and petersmen patronized the kitchen. This afternoon, for instance, soon after Jimmy, the Greek, arrived, another man had sauntered down the unlighted stairs and through the swinging door. He was a tall man, with a small, round head, hard gray eyes, and a hawk's nose. When he had removed his hat, as he did immediately on stepping into the room, it was obvious that he had been long bald; for his head was not only destitute of hair, except for a fringe round the edge, which looked like a chaplet of bay leaves, but the crown had acquired that high polish which comes only with years of baldness.

Jimmy looked up from his bowl of vegetable soup and scowled. Whatever he himself had come here for, it certainly was not for the pleasure of exchanging compliments with "Baldy Levine." Baldy was no crook. He was a crook catcher.

Undeterred by Jimmy's glowering face, Baldy Levine came deliberately across the restaurant and drew out the

chair opposite to Jimmy. His keen, unwinking eyes regarded Jimmy quizzically.

"Well, old-timer," he began, "I'm glad to see you haven't lost your appetite. I didn't know but what the news would kind of upset you, you being so high-strung and sentimental. But you're a philosopher, Jimmy. That's what you are—a philosopher! Why shouldn't you eat?"

"Well, why shouldn't I?" demanded Jimmy, with the ungracious air of a man who says, "Go ahead! Spring it!"

"I guess you're right at that. The prison board met yesterday and fixed 'Big Harry' Walsh's sentence. You remember Big Harry? Kind of handsome gentleman that used to do a little business in your line? Thought you might have met him!"

That was pure sarcasm, and Jimmy ignored it.

"What did them boobs give him?" he demanded surlily.

"Why, they gave him the limit of his indeterminate sentence. He went down on one of those one-to-ten tickets, you know. The board decided if one year had done as much good as Harry thought it had, ten would do him ten times as much. Of course he'll get some off for good behavior—if he behaves!"

Jimmy scowled. It was bad enough for his old pal to have it handed to him in this way, without Baldy Levine, who had arrested Harry, coming here to crow about the affair. But Jimmy was uneasy, and his face showed it. He glanced with a hidden question at the

detective. He knew Levine had not come just for the pleasure of boasting. Baldy Levine wasn't that kind.

"Jimmy," the thief taker continued presently, "I been thinking a lot about you lately. You know, I always figured you got a pretty good noodle. Of course I know you don't never crack a crib, yourself. You don't never stick up a bank messenger. You don't soil your hands with the dirty work in a little job like that department-store robbery down on the corner, the other night. You're the business man of the enterprise, Jimmy. Yes, you got brains—one kind of brains, anyhow. But your brains don't work like mine, and I been wondering about it!"

Baldy paused deliberately to inspect the exterior of his companion's head, as if he hoped in this way to settle his problem. Then he shook his own head disappointedly and continued.

"I suppose some folks would say that I'm honest, and you aren't. But it isn't that. To tell you the truth, Jimmy, I'd just as soon lift a million off some rich duck if I thought I could get away with it. But I know that that sort of thing can't be made to pay. I know that the law would grab me sooner or later, most likely just when I figured I'd got a sure thing. But you—you don't seem to be able to think that way, Jimmy. The only way I can figure it, your brains are all right up to a certain point, but they got a twist. You're cross-eyed morally!"

Jimmy, the Greek, was distinctly uncomfortable. He had a great, though secret, respect for Levine, and something in the detective's ruminating manner to-day impressed him. This was not just talk to frighten him, Levine really had been wondering.

The detective finished his waffle and coffee and went out. His last remark to Jimmy was an admonition.

"Better cut it out, kid," he said. "The game'll get you, same as it did Big Harry Walsh, and 'Mike, the Dip,' and

a hundred others you and me could name. Mind, I don't say that if you stick, I'll have the pleasure of taking you in; but some one will!"

II.

The worst of it was that Jimmy had been thinking in this same direction himself. Not that he had ever considered turning straight. Levine was right when he said that Jimmy was the victim of a sort of moral strabismus. He was incapable of going straight now, whatever he might have been in his earlier years. But there were aspects of his profession, as organizer of big city jobs, that made him uneasy.

Jimmy sat long over his dinner that day, thinking about the matter. From time to time he glanced up absently to see Mother Hanson munching caraway seeds, her long, lean chin, coming rhythmically up to meet the tip of her long, lean nose. But he was not thinking about the old woman. Jimmy had hit upon an idea, and he was exploring its possibilities.

The result of all this cerebration became apparent that evening when Jimmy encountered Nick Deas. Nick was a highly successful operator on modern safes. He knew more about safes than did some of the people who made them. With a different sort of mind, Nick would have been a highly successful machinist or inventor.

To-night he had come to Jimmy with a nebulous plan for robbing the vault of a wholesale jewelry outfit in the lower part of the town. Nick's ideas were always nebulous. That was why he had to call upon Jimmy—to clarify the plan, to arrange the details so that they would dovetail.

Jimmy listened in silence, and when his friend had finished, Jimmy shook his head.

"Nix on that kind of stuff, Nick," he said. "I been thinking about it all aft-

ernoon. You know that big stiff, Baldy Levine? Well, he come into Mother Hanson's this afternoon and give me a spiel about getting pinched. I don't know just what he had up his sleeve, but he got me to thinking. The dicks is getting the deck stacked forty ways nowadays, and it looks to me like it was going to get worse and worse. Take a squint at it right here in town: finger prints, photographs, and Bertillon measurements; half a dozen shotgun squads riding around all the time in armored cars—you know what they done to Billy Epstein last week, shot him full of buckshot; and up at the hall of justice they got experts on everything from handwriting to this new kind of third degree they give you with an alarm clock tied to your wrist, so that it rings a bell if you lie to 'em. It ain't what it used to be, Nick. I got an idea the dicks is kind of putting it over on us!"

Nick Deas scowled. He had lost track of the details of this conversation after the first few words, for Nick's head was not adapted to getting ideas in any abstract way. He had a general notion as to what his companion was saying, however.

"You mean you're going to go straight? Going to get a job, maybe, and duck under the counter every time you see one of your old friends comin' in?"

"No, I ain't going to work," Jimmy replied. His brows were knit, for he was wondering if he ought to take Nick in on this new idea of his. Possibly he could handle it himself; but, after all, there would be plenty in it for both. "I'm going to cut out the big burgs, Nick," he added. "That's where the trouble comes in. All the boys you and me know, that have gone down the bay, got caught in the city. Most of 'em got tangled with some bank that had one of these detective-agency contracts. Some of them bumped up against the

Federal law, counterfeiting, and one thing and another. Chances is they wouldn't have tackled anything like that if they hadn't been in the city. There's plenty of easy money in the country, without a man's taking big chances!"

Nick's jaw gaped, but he was evidently impressed.

"You think a man could clean up some real kale in the country?" he demanded.

"Sure; and he wouldn't be running into a bunch of guys like Baldy Levine all the time. Baldy was after Big Harry Walsh two years, and he got him. Harry got so he was seeing things. He lost his appetite and couldn't rest at night. Now out in the country there ain't nothing but a bunch of boob constables, with long whiskers and bass-wood clubs. If they got guns, they don't know how to shoot 'em. And they think a finger print is something the hired girl puts on the butter before she sets it on the table!"

Nick's little eyes, which were obviously not a pair, had begun to glow. The finger-print system of identification is the particular nightmare of safe blowers; and Nick had never got used to the feeling of rubber gloves.

For half an hour the two crooks sat with their heads close together. Their enthusiasm mounted, as they went into details. Before they parted, they had arranged to leave the city for a time and to pick up some easy money in the country.

III.

Night had settled comfortably down over the little town of Greenville. Jimmy, the Greek, and his companion, Nick Deas, sat in their automobile in the shelter of a hedge two hundred yards from the principal store of the village. They had been staying at the "tin-can camp" on the edge of town for the past few days, getting a line-up on things; and to-night they were going to do their first stroke of business along the new lines.

"When I seen that old billy goat with the chin whiskers and the tin star, I thought I'd croak!" Jimmy was saying. "I seen guys like him in funny shows, but I didn't suppose they had 'em really anywhere. But the old boy takes himself as serious as a hanging judge!"

Nick grunted.

"Some classy little burg, at that," he commented. "Tin-can camp, public square, civic center, with pipe organ and lecture halls——"

"And concert room for free radio concerts every night!" Jimmy broke in jovially. "The whole bunch of them are up there right now, except this old duck that sleeps in the store. And he'd be there if he wasn't deaf!"

For a time they were silent. They were watching the single lighted window in the back of the store building. That was where the old man slept—the grizzly old pioneer, deaf in both ears, who was both janitor and watchman for the establishment.

Presently the light disappeared. The old man had gone to bed. Jimmy consulted his watch.

"Half past nine," he said. "These rubes sure do hit the hay early. Well, there ain't nothing else for them to do. There ain't even a railroad station in town for the kids to hang around, and the last auto stage comes in at seven. Probably that's why they put in that municipal radio outfit—so's they'd have something to do nights, if they didn't want to go to roost with the chickens."

Nick did not reply.

They climbed down out of the machine presently and made their way across some vacant lots toward the store building. They knew exactly where everything was located. Slipping into an alley that separated the store building from the local telephone exchange, they were approaching the side window they had marked as their means of entrance, when Jimmy paused and stood looking up. Clearly etched against the

sky were the multitudinous wires of the exchange.

"I don't know—maybe we ought to clip them," he observed. "There ain't no telegraph office in town, and with them wires cut——"

Nick Deas shook his head.

"We'll be through in half an hour. I got a good look at that old cracker box to-day, when the boss was changing that bill for me. I could open it with a can opener. And it takes time to cut wires. Le's get busy!"

From a window farther down the solid wall of the store came the sound of steady snoring. The old watchman was sleeping the sleep of the just, and he was stone deaf!

"Some system!" Jimmy chuckled, as he placed an apple box against the wall and made his way leisurely through the window that led into the office. "It ain't much like the job a fellow has on his hands in the big burgs, I'll say!"

Inside the office, the two crooks worked skillfully and swiftly. They brought a bale of colored goods and covered the window leading into the alley and the glass-paneled door. Nick made his way stealthily to the big store-room behind and brought an armful of gunny sacks and a mattress. Then, with the windows hidden and the lamp lighted, he got to work at the safe.

"Some idea, 'ol!" he grumbled. "I got to hand it to you—you sure got a brain in your head!"

At the end of half an hour's work with the drills, Nick placed his shot and muffled the safe with the gunny sacks and the mattress. Then he and Jimmy stepped outside the office door and waited. The ensuing explosion was hardly a sound—it was rather a sensation of pressure, as if the walls of the store had been squeezed together suddenly and as suddenly released.

The crooks returned to the safe and threw back the wrappings. Nick fanned away the pungent fumes and

grumbled about the headache they would be sure to give him. But the eyes of both men were focused gloatingly on the door of the safe, which was ajar.

"Easy money!" growled Jimmy as he slipped the rubber band from a package of currency and began to shuffle the bills. Then he dropped the money into a kit bag at his side. Fumbling again in the interior of the safe, he brought out two more bundles of bank notes. His eyes met the eyes of his companion with leering triumph.

"What'd I tell you?" he demanded. "Small-town stuff, eh? Me for it."

At a sound from the door both men whirled. An old fellow in shirt and trousers, but without shoes or stockings, was standing there, an ancient single-action revolver of large caliber in his skinny, but remarkably steady, hand.

"Hands up!" he cried. "I thought I felt something—couldn't be sure, but just come to be on the safe side! Hey, you little man nearest the wall, you stick up your hands——"

Jimmy's senses were in a whirl. He realized with some distant corner of his mind that the concussion had awakened the old watchman. Unwinkingly the crook's eyes regarded the muzzle of that huge gun. It looked like the opening of a stove pipe. And in that same instant of amazed inspection, he became aware of another thing: Nick Deas was stealthily reaching for his automatic.

There came another shrill warning from the old man.

"Hey, you little man——"

Nick's gun was out of its holster. He swung it up and forward. But before he could bring it into position for a hip shot, the revolver in the hands of the watchman roared. Jimmy saw Deas pitch forward. In another instant that cannon would be turned upon him. With a motion wonderfully easy and precise, Jimmy swung his own automatic from his side pocket and fired. He had practiced that shot a thousand

times. Without a flicker of his eyelids he saw the old man crumple to his knees and next instant sag forward with his face to the floor. The bullet had drilled him through the temples.

Jimmy, the Greek, showed the stuff he was made of, now that an emergency was upon him. With coldly calculating eyes he stood looking from one dead man to the other. This was a horrible botch, and it was all the fault of Deas. If the peterman had had sense enough to play a waiting game, they could have outwitted this old fool without killing him. Now Deas was dead, and the noose dangling over Jimmy's head.

There was no need for him to stick his head into it, however. Surveying the room with eyes that looked like chips of ice, the crook took in the details that bore upon his plan. Nick was lying close to the safe, and at his side was the bag containing his tools and the booty. The latter would have to be sacrificed. For safety, absolute and unshakable safety, lay only in giving the local officials, who to-morrow would investigate this affair, the impression that it had been a one-man job, and that the thief had already paid the penalty.

Obviously there was nothing for Jimmy to do but to leave the place as quickly as possible. The scenery was all properly set. And the unquieting thought came to him that those shots might have been heard. He crossed toward the window. He reached it and stood listening. Not a sound from without. He thrust one leg across the sill and leaped back, his face going suddenly white. He had forgotten one all-important detail. Nick's gun had not been fired!

A chill came over Jimmy, the Greek, as he turned back into the room. He realized how nearly he had committed a blunder which even the local police, with all their inefficiency, could not have missed. Crossing to the body of his friend, he stooped and effected a change

of weapons. Nick's gun lay on the floor, just beside his sagging fingers, Jimmy picked it up and put his own exactly where the other had been. And on the way back to the window he bethought himself of another detail. He would cut those telephone wires now so as to sever connection by wire with all the surrounding country. It would naturally be inferred that Nick Deas had done this before attempting his robbery of the safe. After some search Jimmy found a pair of cutting pliers, which he took with him when he finally made his way into the alley.

Cutting the wires took time, but it would be worth it. Greenville occupied a crossroad in an extensive and fertile valley. There would be no way of checking up on travelers on these four roads, now that the wires were severed. Jimmy climbed down from the roof of the shed, where he had stood to complete this job, and again stood listening.

The silence suddenly struck him as unnatural. Was it possible that no one had heard the great booming shot of the old-fashioned black-powder gun? He didn't believe it for a moment. The conviction gripped him that his enemies were gathering somewhere up the street.

Well, he would fool them. They would find only Nick Deas!

As Jimmy's engine hummed smoothly, and his car sped southward over the hard-surfaced highway, he checked up on the night's work. It had threatened to end in disaster, but he had saved the day for himself, which, after all, was the only point that really mattered. True, Nick was dead; but there were plenty more petersmen. As for the old man whom Jimmy had so ruthlessly killed, he scarcely gave the matter a thought. That was a mere executive detail.

"And I have done everything I should have done," he mumbled pleasantly. "Left the kale—some folks would have took that and spilled the beans. And I

swapped guns with Nick. Come near tripping on that. A man has to have a good head, just like Baldy Levine says I've got. Say, it's a good thing I cut them wires. Suppose some one *did* hear them shots, and they *do* get in there before morning? They might have had wits enough to phone ahead, just to see if there was any one else in it that was trying to make a get-away!"

IV.

At one o'clock on the afternoon following the affair in Greenville, Jimmy, the Greek, emerged from his curtained automobile, where, in a patent bed bought for his country work, he had been having a long and comfortable sleep.

Now he paused to look about him. He had landed soon after midnight at this tin-can camp, and he had found a place for his machine near the bathhouse and kitchen which formed its center. There was probably a hundred different outfits here, and Jimmy grinned, as his keen eyes inspected them. It would be like looking for a needle in a haystack to try to find one machine out of the hundreds, and probably thousands, flitting from camp to camp in this part of the State. Not that that mattered. No one would be looking for Jimmy, the Greek. He had seen to that.

The crook turned briskly into a neatly graveled path that led through the camp and toward the adjacent small town. He wanted two things: food and a city paper. Theoretically Jimmy was a tin-can tourist, but he had no notion of ruining his stomach by living on canned goods.

He made his way uptown, paused at a cigar stand for a paper, and crossed to a restaurant. Here he ordered a substantial meal and began his search of the front page. Ah, there it was! He read the meager story carefully, and a smile

creased his crafty face. They had swallowed his bait and also the hook, line and sinker. The story stated that this had been a one-man job, and that the yegg had been shot by the watchman who had in turn gone down before the robber's bullet.

So intent was Jimmy on his perusal of this interesting account that he was only dimly aware of the opening of the door. But at the sound of a familiar voice, he leaped from his chair and stood with open mouth and glaring eyes. The voice was the voice of Baldy Levine, and the detective himself stood across the table.

"Well, Jimmy," he greeted the startled crook sardonically, "I told you you'd slip! Why the deuce couldn't you have taken my word for it?"

By a tremendous effort the crook mastered his panic. This was just a bluff on the part of Levine. He had blundered upon Jimmy, had heard of the crime in Greenville, and was trying to get a confession by tactics that had been old when Cain slew Abel. But it wouldn't work here.

"What you trying to pull?" Jimmy demanded surlily. "You think you got something on me? Not a chance—not a chance!"

Levine glanced over his shoulder toward the door. Then he drew out the chair across from Jimmy and sat down.

"We got a few minutes to talk," he said. "I don't mind visiting a bit, Jimmy. It may help you find out just where you're at!"

Jimmy understood that scheme, also. Baldy hoped to get him to talk, on the chance that he would inadvertently furnish a lead. Well, that wouldn't work. He clamped his teeth together and sat staring at the detective.

"Oh, I ain't going to try to get you to say anything," Levine replied to this look. "I'm going to tell you about it, Jimmy. But first I got to say that it was a pretty raw deal, shooting the old man that way. It was different with

Nick—he tried to pot the old guy by beating him to the draw. I guess you boys didn't never hear of old Tim McKinney? That was him you shot last night, and, if you hadn't had him between you, he'd have cleaned you both. McKinney was known as a dead shot back in the days when shooting was shooting!"

The face of Jimmy, the Greek, turned slowly to the color of paper. This was no ordinary attempt to trap him into damaging admissions. Baldy Levine's voice was bland and triumphant. It was the voice of a man who *knew*.

And then the impossibility of the thing came to the crook. It was impossible for Levine or any one else to know anything about it. This was bluff—the detective was trying to shake his nerves!

"You lie!" he screamed, half rising from his chair.

"Sit down!" Levine's voice was peremptory, and his right hand moved in his side pocket, as he continued confidently: "I don't generally allow folks to make that remark to me and get away with it, Jimmy, but you belong to the State now. I ain't got no right to drill you unless you try to start something more than talk. Listen!"

Again Levine looked over his shoulder toward the outside door. He turned back and continued crisply.

"I'm going to give you the dope on this thing, so you won't waste no time trying to lie. When you and Nick pulled your freight out of the city, I was considerably surprised. I'd been watching both of you, but you know what that amounts to. I got fifty other crooks to keep track of, and I couldn't palaver around with you all the time. I heard you'd gone out of town, but at first I didn't believe it. Now I know what you thought you was up to. You went to Greenville, picking that little burg because it was small and had only a couple of constables, both of 'em with

gray whiskers, and there was no railroad and no telegraph lines. But there was plenty of money. It looked like a cinch!

"Next you sized things up and picked this dump where old Tim was watchman. You went in last night and cracked the crib. Nick done that, all right, but you was with him. And when the old man came on you, I'll tell you just what happened: he had you both covered, but Nick thought because he was so old most likely he couldn't shoot straight. So Nick made a grab for his gat, and old Tim drilled him between the eyes. That was as nice a shot as the old man ever made, I reckon. What happened next? Why, you got stampered; most likely you thought you'd be the next lucky man; so you plugged old Tim McKinney. Oh, yes you did, Jimmy. You stuck your head through the noose last night, sure enough!"

He paused, regarding the man sitting across the table from him with studious eyes. Jimmy, the Greek, had already become that interesting animal, a human being doomed to die on the scaffold. Levine's eyes told that story eloquently.

The crook's face was gray and moist. He had been threatened and questioned by police officers before, but he had never been talked to in this way.

"T—I——" he stammered.

"You shut up! I'm talking. I'm going to tell you how you knocked over the dominoes last night. You know how the kids stand 'em up, then knock over one and the whole line goes down? Well, that was what you did!"

Levine paused and again glanced over his shoulder. The restaurant door had opened, and a bewhiskered old gentleman with a gleaming star pinned to his coat marched in. Jimmy recognized the newcomer as one of the two policemen of Greenville. This one was Chief Leonard. The other was the assistant chief. Baldy Levine nodded to his professional brother.

"Sit down just a minute, chief," he commanded. "I've been telling your prisoner about how he balled things up over in Greenville. Well, Jimmy, the first thing the chief noticed when he got into the place last night was that Nick had been shot between the eyes, but that the old man had been drilled from temple to temple. Now it would have been impossible for Nick to have got in a shot after he was plugged through the head. I remember a big negro that was shot through the head back East; and he killed three plain-clothes men before he keeled over himself. Bullet shock is a queer thing, and these modern small-caliber, high-velocity bullets do some funny stunts. Yes, Nick might have come back; but never in all the world, Jimmy, could he shoot a man who was facing him *through the temples*. That was done from the side; and, as soon as the chief here saw that, he knew there was another man in on it.

"And there was another way he knew that I'll come to in a minute. First I want to tell you about what a silly stunt you did when you cut them telephone wires. You see, the girl at central don't expect many calls late at night, but she does expect some. When all of a sudden everything stopped, she tried to call up a party and found the wires dead. She was a bright girl—not one of them pug-nosed dames you used to flirt around with in the city—and, as soon as she discovered that, she went down into the alley and saw that the wires had been cut. Then what do you suppose she did, Jimmy?"

The crook's ashen lips quivered. He shut them firmly and stared.

"Well, she went up to the community center and found the chief, who was taking in the radio entertainment. She told him what had happened, and inside of five minutes he discovered why the wires had been cut. Now the chief here is a kind of fan on detective work, Jimmy, and he seen at the first look that

old Tim was shot from the side. Then he went through the kit of tools and found that there wasn't nothing there a man could cut wires with. Where had the cutting pliers gone? Why, the man who had shot McKinney from the side, while the old man was facing Nick Deas, had carried them away. It was this second man that had cut the wires, as he started on his get-away. That meant he was traveling by auto and didn't want news of the murder phoned ahead!"

Jimmy, the Greek, was fast sinking into that condition of abstraction where the senses function without being able to register on the central switchboard of consciousness. He heard, but he didn't comprehend. He saw the ancient town marshal standing fiercely at his side, feet wide apart, listening with pride to this account of his achievements as a detective. And now Levine was continuing.

"When you cut the wires, you really knocked over two dominoes, Jimmy. First, you notified Greenville that a crime had been committed; and, second, you failed to shut Greenville off from the rest of the State, as you'd hoped to do. You see, you know the city pretty well, but you don't know the modern American small town. You didn't know, for instance, that the Greenville board of trade has a wireless-sending outfit, for telling the nation what a fine place Greenville is. But the chief here knew that, and before you were two miles from town he had the operator broadcasting the news. That was how he learned that a car bearing the number '653-237' was beating it along the highway at just about that time. By the time the phone wires were spliced, information was coming in from every little town along the road. All these small-town people have radio outfits now, and they don't go to roost as early as they used to. That was why they was all on the lookout for you. When you parked at the camp here, you had

been followed every mile of the way along the boulevard!"

Jimmy stared. His senses were clearing somewhat, and he thought he saw a link missing from this chain of evidence.

"I never done it!" he said. "I didn't know Nick was going to pull this till I read the paper this evening!"

There was silence in the little restaurant, and the crook, looking with rat eyes up at his captors, saw something on their faces that was hard to understand. It was the expression of men who hate to jerk from the clutch of a drowning man the straw he clings to.

Then Baldy Levine mopped his forehead, sighed, and spoke.

"It ain't no use, kid! You might as well come clean. You see, you and Nick were so sure everything would be open and shut out here in the country that Nick didn't wear no gloves. His finger prints were not found on the gun with which old Tim McKinney was killed, but yours were. Now Chief Leonard is a kind of a nut on finger-print identification. He's president of the State association of experts and has written a book on finger printing. He saw in a minute the prints on the gun, and he got out his camera and in a couple of hours time had a set of glossy enlargements of those prints on the way to the nearest railway station. I got the enlargements first thing this morning.

"And when I-identified those prints, Jimmy, I knew where you'd disappeared to, and what you'd been doing. You'd written your name all over that gun, as if you were scared we might miss it!"

Levine paused and looked steadily at the man cowering in the chair before him.

"Kid," he concluded, "if ever you come back to this earth for a second try at crook stuff, keep away from small towns! There isn't a thing we got in the city that they haven't got there. As a matter of fact, they're usually about ten jumps ahead of us!"

Gems of Ill Omen

& Douglas Grey

Author of "Thorndyke Flint and the Poisoned Groom,"
"Thorndyke Flint's Bank Mystery," etc.

A THORNDYKE FLINT STORY

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

THE Cranbourne jewels, secreted within a davenport, are being transported from Milton Rounders' Park Avenue apartment to his country home, known as Storm Brink Manor. "Thorndyke" Flint, a famous criminologist, and a friend of Mr. Rounders, is present in the courtyard when the van arrives. The door at the rear of the van is found open, and when they enter they discover the body of a man on the davenport. The Cranbourne jewels are gone! Thorndyke recognizes the dead man as the leader of The Boxer Gang, who is known as "Bill, the Boxer."

Thorndyke Flint and his assistant, Ray Norton, visit Mullins' place and are there when Loydall, one of The Boxer Gang, arrives to break the news of the murder of Bill, the Boxer, to Bill's brother Buck. Thorndyke Flint knocks out Buck, whom they leave at Mullins', and they take Loydall with them to Flint's apartment, where they keep him a prisoner.

CHAPTER VI.

A "MATERIAL WITNESS."

WHAT about this Buck Brown, chief?" asked Ray Norton, as they sat at breakfast together in Thorndyke Flint's sunny dining room the next morning. "Want me to look him up before I start this afternoon with J. C. Lynne for Storm Brink?"

"Think you could find him?"

"I'd bet on it, unless he's beat it from New York. He has a room at Mullins', an' even if he didn't sleep in it last night I could find out from Mullins where he is. That gink hasn't brains enough to hold back anything. You see, he only knows me as Billy Ray, the dip, and he'd spill to me all he knows."

"You think Brown would let him know if he is trying to get away?"

"Even if he didn't, I can find him. I know all the places he'd be likely to go. So do you, for that matter."

"I don't want Buck Brown at present," said Flint, helping himself to another egg. "We have other things more important to look after. Did you see that Loydall has breakfast?"

"Yes. I took it up to him myself. He's locked in his room, and he ate as if he'd missed all three meals yesterday. Wanted to know what you were going to do with him."

Thorndyke Flint did not answer. He finished his breakfast, waited on by his house man, Williams, and as he and Ray went into the library, the rattling of dishes told that Williams had summoned a maid to clear things away.

The detective's household, under the direction of his capable housekeeper, Mrs. Prine, always ran smoothly, whether he was at home or not.

There was the morning mail to engage Thorndyke's attention. Then he directed Ray to bring Loydall down.

"You are going to Storm Brink Manor with me, Loydall," he told the anxious man. "It will depend on your own behavior there whether or not I turn you over to the police on a charge of robbery and murder."

"I didn't do nothing," whined Loydall in a weak voice.

"Do you call conspiring to steal the Cranbourne jewels nothing?"

"I didn't steal them."

"And I shall have to verify the story

you told me last night. We do not know yet whether you killed Bill Brown."

"I told you all I knowed about it. It was the truth, s'help——"

"If it was, you have nothing to fear on that account," was the quiet response. Flint swung around in his chair and transfixed the trembling crook with a keen glance that struck terror to his soul. "You will go with me to Storm Brink, and you will be watched all the time you are there, so it will not pay you to play tricks. You've got to answer any questions put to you, and to do as you're told. When we've found the man who killed Boxer Bill, you can go, that is, if you didn't kill him yourself."

"But I didn't do it!" wailed Loydall. "How could I when I wasn't in the van at all? Don't be too hard on a guy what's going straight, Mr.——"

"If you don't know my name, I'll tell you," interrupted the detective. "I am Thorndyke Flint!"

Loydall's knees bent, and he sank limply into a chair, his face greenish white and his mouth lolling open in the extremity of his terror.

Thorndyke Flint glanced at him contemptuously and turned to his young assistant. "Ray, you know the garage in Park Avenue where Mr. Rounders keeps his cars, and the men there know you. Get that roadster I drove from Storm Brink yesterday and bring it here. Hurry! I'll telephone the garage people you are coming, so they'll be ready. First take this man back upstairs and lock him in."

An hour later Thorndyke Flint sat at the wheel of the powerful roadster, sweeping along the smooth State road in the direction of Storm Brink Manor. Loydall crouched at his side, from time to time glancing surreptitiously at the stern face of the man who was more dreaded by the creatures of the underworld than any single individual in all the great New York police department.

3D—DS

"What's new, Jud?" were Thorndyke Flint's first words to his assistant, who had seen the car coming and was waiting in the Storm Brink courtyard to greet his employer. "Haven't found the jewelry?"

"Not a smell of it," was Frank Judson's sad answer. "Old Rounders has had his secretary helping him ransack everything that came in the van, both in the bedroom and his den. But they haven't found anything. What with this hunting for the jewelry and preparations for the dinner and dance to-night, we've had a circus here, and it isn't over yet."

"Have you seen Mrs. Rounders?"

Judson broke into a painful grin. "Have I? Haven't I? She's been raving all over the house. There's one good thing. She's so anxious to make a hit with the swell crowd that's coming, that I'm blessed if she doesn't once in a while forget the Cranbourne pearls and diamonds she meant to wear to-night. She's in the ballroom now, giving the decorators and florists fits."

Both men laughed.

"Yet I'll wager everything will be all right at the reception to-night," said Thorndyke smilingly. "Money will do anything, and there's no scarcity of that."

"No, there's no scarcity of dough," returned Judson, shaking his head and still grinning. "But the chef threatened to quit right there if the old lady didn't keep away from the kitchen and dining room. He's a twenty-thousand dollar bird, and he wears a red ribbon across his white shirt front. You ought to see him, chief. He looks like an ambassador, or a king. I tell you old Tutankhamen had nothing on him. You should have seen the madam beating it. She didn't dare answer back a single word."

While Frank Judson was telling in sprightly fashion of the doings at the manor, his employer alighted from the

roadster and directed Loydall to get down too.

"Frank," he said in a low tone, unheard by any one else around, "this is Loydall. He is here as a 'material witness,' and I want you to take charge of him."

"Stay right with him?" asked Judson, somewhat dismayed.

"Not necessarily. I only want you to produce him when I have occasion to use him. He understands that it will be to his advantage to behave himself. So long as he does not try to go outside the house you can let him alone. Otherwise, take him below and lock him in a cellar. There are plenty of them in this big house, and they are dark."

Thorndyke paused.

"Boss, I won't try to get away," put in Loydall. "Where do you want me to go? I've worked in restaurants as a waiter."

"Good idea!" observed Judson. "I'll have him put to work in the kitchen." He looked questioningly at Thorndyke, who nodded assent. "Come on, Loydall."

"Go to our room when you've put him in safe hands," was Flint's injunction, as Judson moved to take Loydall into the house to consign him to the captain of the male kitchen staff. "I have some instructions for you."

"All right, chief," answered Judson cheerfully. He was glad to see his employer back again.

Thorndyke Flint, when he had seen one of the garage men take charge of the roadster, made his way to Milton Rounders' den, where he found Willis sorting some mail. The secretary looked tired and haggard.

"It's hard work getting ready for such a big thing as this to-night," remarked Willis with a weary smile. "I'm trying to get as much work out of the way as I can, for there'll be no chance to touch anything to-morrow or for a day or two afterward, I'm afraid."

"Any news about the Cranbourne jewels?" asked Thorndyke.

"Nothing. We've searched everywhere," was the lugubrious reply. "They never came into the house, that's certain."

"No clew to the person who killed that man?"

"How could there be?" asked the secretary with a shrug. "The rascal who killed him is far enough away from here, you may be sure. I was going to ask whether you had learned anything in New York. Have you?"

"I hardly care to say," was the slow reply.

"Does that mean you have a clew?" pressed Willis. "This mysterious Z, who has been sending anonymous notes to Mr. Rounders, do you know who he is? Has he anything to do with it?"

"Why should you think so?"

"There is so much mystery about him, and he talks about the Cranbourne jewels."

"He doesn't mention them in any of the three notes I have seen," corrected the detective. "He says, as I remember, 'The Boxer Gang is after them. Keep them safe in bank.' Isn't that it?"

He waited for an answer.

"Yes. But by 'them' he evidently means the Cranbourne jewelry, for those are all the valuables of that kind Mr. Rounders keeps in his safe-deposit vault. As his secretary I know that. Then he says The Boxer Gang is after them, and here is a member of that gang killed, and the jewelry taken from him."

"Well done, Willis," exclaimed Thorndyke Flint heartily. "Your deductive perceptions are creditable to you. You believe that Z, or some of his friends, know The Boxer Gang intended to steal the Cranbourne collection last night, and intercepted them, incidentally killing Boxer Bill when he resisted?"

"It looks like it, doesn't it?" asked Willis, throwing out his hands argumentatively, palms upward.

"There's logic in the theory," certainly," the detective admitted. "If you are right in your surmise, the thing to do will be to detect Z at the reception and find out whether he is the guilty person or not."

"That's my idea," assented Willis modestly. "If you have any clew to his identity, that would help."

"No doubt," agreed Thorndyke Flint. "Well then I can depend on your co-operation this evening?"

"Indeed you can," declared Willis eagerly.

"Even if there should be a fight?" asked the detective. "A man like Z might turn out to be an ugly customer to tackle. Evidently he doesn't lack courage, or he wouldn't be coming here to-night with a challenge, for his last note is nothing less. How much do you weigh, Mr. Willis?"

"I'm an inch over six feet, and I weigh nearly two hundred," was the reply, with the touch of vanity that distinguishes most men when they feel that they are the right thing physically.

"Played football at college, I suppose?"

Willis laughed reminiscently. "Yes; I was the man generally chosen to kick the goal. You see, nature has furnished me with pretty fair kickers," he added, as he held up a good-sized foot for the detective's inspection.

The braying of a klaxon took Thorndyke Flint to the window. "It's a taxi," he announced. "Some of the guests are coming early."

"I'll bet it's that Mr. J. Cranbourne Lynne," answered Willis. "Mr. Rounders said he expected him ahead of all the others. Yes, there's Mr. Rounders going out to open the door of the cab. You'd think the taxi man would do that. That fellow doesn't know his business."

But Thorndyke Flint privately decided that the driver *did* know his business, for it was Ray Norton!

CHAPTER VII.

SECRET RECORDS.

THEY stood at the window while Rounders ushered Mr. Lynne into the house by the wide front door, approached by an imposing flight of marble steps. The detective smiled inwardly at the spectacle of Ray, in his character of taxi driver, with two liveried footmen, carrying in a traveling bag and two or three other packages, including a banjo in a case. As a recognized society entertainer, J. C. Lynne always took his "props" with him.

In a minute or two Ray ran down the steps again, and Flint noted with satisfaction that Frank Judson met him in the courtyard as the cab drove into it from the broad sweep of graveled roadway, and, after a short colloquy, sent him on his way to the garage.

All this was in accordance with Flint's instructions to his two assistants. Ray was to make his headquarters in the garage, taking his meals with the domestic staff in the house. That he would keep his eyes and ears open for anything that might lead to the ultimate discovery of the person or persons concerned in the double crime which was the main reason for the detective and his lieutenants being at Storm Brink Manor, was a matter of course.

"By Jove! They are coming up here," exclaimed the secretary, as one of the footmen, followed by his colleague, both loaded with the Lynne impedimenta, pushed open that door. "Put those things in there," he ordered the servants, pointing to the open door of his own room.

"Here we are, Lynne!" cried Rounders in his blustering way. "Come into my sacred den. Brought all the stuff in it from our apartment in New York. Like to have my old things about me. Can't work with new tools. You know how that is! You couldn't punk well with anybody else's banjo, I'll bet!"

Milton Rounders had all this out before his guest appeared in the doorway, smiling and suave, and bowed tentatively to Thorndyke Flint and Willis.

"Oh, yes, Lynne!" went on Rounders, suddenly remembering his duties as host and making a belated introduction. "Mr. Thorndyke Flint, and my secretary, Mr. Willis—Mr. J. Cranbourne Lynne."

A fine-built, tall man was J. Cranbourne Lynne. Thorndyke Flint, with swift appraisement, estimated his weight at two hundred pounds or so, and as Lynne stood by the side of the secretary, he noted that they were of about the same height.

Notwithstanding that Mr. Lynne had been so petted by some of the leading matrons in society as to be referred to by certain jealous young men, envious of his social success, as a "tame cat," Thorndyke Flint decided on looking him over that he could give a good account of himself in any athletic endeavor. That Lynne was a finished boxer, a fine tennis player, and a good man in an eight-oar shell, everybody knew.

"Mrs. Rounders will be glad to know you are here, Lynne," boomed the millionaire, as his guest sat down and took a proffered cigarette. "She says you have promised to sing and play and do a few card tricks after dinner. It's awfully good of you. She didn't want to have hired professionals, and, besides, it's so much more pleasing to everybody when it's one of ourselves who is helping to pass the time with a few stunts. Eh, Flint? By jings! When I get warmed up after dinner I might do a song and dance myself! Wow!"

Milton Rounders broke into a tempest of laughter at his own pleasantry. But the detective was not deceived by this uproarious gayety. He could see that the millionaire had recovered hardly at all from the shock of losing the Cranbourne jewels, and it was only with a

great effort that he hid his anxiety under this veneer of false hilarity.

"I shall be delighted to do anything I can in my poor way," said Lynne modestly. "I trust Mrs. Rounders is quite well."

"Fit as a fiddle!" blurted out Rounders. "A little bothered over all this preparation, but she'll be in tiptop shape when once she sits down to dinner and sees that the eats are all right. We'll go and see her directly. I've sent her word you are here."

"If you'll pardon me," put in Thorndyke Flint, "I have some little matters to attend to, and——"

"All right, Flint!" shouted Rounders boisterously. "I understand! If you hear anything about that—that—m'm—you know—wish you'd tell me right away. We'll excuse you. Want to change your toggery, of course. Mind you are ready when dinner is announced, and bring your appetite with you. Ha, ha!"

Milton Rounders' loud laughter followed Thorndyke Flint down the long hallway by which he reached the butler's pantry, where he had instructed Judson to be as soon as J. Cranbourne Lynne should arrive.

He met Judson just outside the pantry door and beckoned him into one of the automatic electric elevators by which passengers could ascend to the upper floors of the Manor merely by touching a button.

"Well, Judson, he's here," remarked Flint, as he reached the luxuriously furnished bedchamber that had been assigned to him, and which adjoined a similar room occupied by Frank Judson. "What did Ray say?"

"Only that he found Mr. Lynne waiting for him when he drove up to the Central Park West apartment with his taxi. They telephoned up to Lynne's suite, and he came right down. Then the hallman put the banjo and some other stuff into the cab and Lynne got

in. One of the hall men told Ray to drive to Storm Brink Manor—as if it were just around the corner—and away he came.”

“Have any conversation with Lynne on the way?”

“No,” replied Judson. “They stopped once at a hotel some forty miles from New York, where Lynne went inside for ten minutes. He came out smoking a cigar, gave one to Ray, and told him to keep on steadily to Storm Brink, and to ‘hit her up’ to fifty, if his engine could do it.”

“That all?”

“Everything.”

“Lynne didn’t seem to have anything weighing on his mind? Wasn’t excited, or noticeably thoughtful?” asked the detective.

“No. Ray said he was singing in the cab part of the time. Practicing for this evening, I guess. What do you think of him?”

“What I think is of small consequence, Jud,” returned Thorndyke. “It’s what I can *prove* that counts.” He handed a small key to his assistant. “Bring my private index.”

There was a leather steamer trunk in a corner. It was strongly made, with several brass clasps. Frank Judson unlocked it. Then he manipulated a secret catch and flung up the lid.

The detective’s evening attire lay, neatly folded, within. Judson took it out, with various articles of haberdashery, all of which he laid on the bed. Then he went back to the trunk, and after a moment’s fumbling inside, opened a slit in the inner wall and drew from it a morrocco-covered notebook. The book had an ordinary gilt clasp, but was further secured by two flat brass bands which prevented even a glimpse of the pages within.

With a diminutive key that he took from his waistcoat pocket, Thorndyke Flint unfastened the flat brass bands and the clasp. Then, placing the book on

a table under a shaded incandescent light, he sat down to examine it. An index made it easy for him to turn at once to the name he wanted.

“Come over here, Jud.”

His assistant stood behind, peering over his shoulder, as Flint pointed to the top of a page and read, in low, but distinct tones:

“LYNNE, JOHN CRANBOURNE. Son of Jared Lynne and Melissa (Cranbourne) Lynne. Born 1891. Unmarried. Capitalist. Brick-making interests. Member of several clubs in New York and London. Athletic. Talented musician and social entertainer. Habits not bad. Drinks sometimes, but not to excess. Particular in dress and lover of jewelry. Great pride in his mother’s family and respect for family traditions. Even tempered, but subject to violent fits of passion when aroused. Dangerous at such times. Arrested for nearly killing man in Broadway café in 1915, and heavily fined. Father and mother dead. No brothers or sisters.”

As he finished reading this record, Thorndyke Flint held the book open and regarded it in silence for more than a minute.

Frank Judson, familiar with the ways of his employer, dropped into a chair and waited for Thorndyke to speak.

“You know who was the mother of Mrs. Jared Lynne, Jud?” said Thorndyke Flint at last.

“Mrs. John Cranbourne,” replied Judson promptly.

“Who was leader of society in New York and Newport up to about fifteen years ago,” added Thorndyke. “It was she who formerly wore the jewels that are giving Mrs. Milton Rounders so much anxiety just now. You see the connection, of course?”

“But they were never owned by this J. Cranbourne Lynne, were they?”

“No. They did not come to his branch of the family at all,” replied Flint. “They went to Mrs. Cranbourne’s eldest son, Irving Cranbourne, who was killed in 1918, in the last month of the war. He was a bachelor. The bulk of his

property went to his sister, Melissa Cranbourne Lynne, J. C. Lynne's mother, but the famous Cranbourne jewels, valued at about half a million dollars, Irving willed to Miss Fifi Trevlyan, a dancer."

"I remember that," interposed Judson. "There was an attempt to have the bequest set aside, but Miss Trevlyan beat the lawsuit and kept the jewelry. It was quite a celebrated case, a first-page story in the newspapers for more than a month."

"I knew you couldn't have forgotten that," remarked Flint quietly. "In course of time the collection was sold, and eventually came into the hands of Milton Rounders through the big diamond house of Barrany."

"Still, chief, I can't see how that involves J. C. Lynne in this case."

"There were traditions connected with the Cranbourne pearl necklace, which embraced the great emerald and the diamond coronets as well," said Thorndyke Flint, unheeding his assistant's last remark. "I don't know how it originated—I don't believe anybody does who is still alive—but it was the firm conviction of the Mrs. Cranbourne, the great leader of society, that if the Cranbourne jewels were out of the Cranbourne family five years it would mean disaster to any Cranbourne then alive. If you figure it out, you will see that it is nearly five years since Irving Cranbourne was killed in France and Fifi Trevlyan came into possession of the jewelry."

"Then you think——"

"That John Cranbourne Lynne, who is the last of the Cranbourne family, according to report, would be willing to pay the money required for the Cranbourne jewels so that the threat conveyed by the legend would not be fulfilled."

"But you don't believe there is anything in that legend, or tradition, do you, chief?"

Thorndyke Flint turned a grave face to his assistant while he closed his secret record, locked the brass bands, and handed the book to him.

"That is too deep a question to be determined by any one, offhand," he said. "If John Cranbourne Lynne believes it, that is enough for us to work on. What we have to decide, if we can, is how far he would go to possess himself of the jewelry which, according to the legend, controls his life or death."

"He has a pretty good record," remarked Judson, as he restored the private index to its hiding place in the trunk and turned the key. "He does not act or look like a murderer—or thief either."

Thorndyke Flint took the key from his lieutenant and placed it in his waistcoat pocket, giving Judson a quizzical look as he did so.

"How many people who kill others do look like murderers, Jud? If every murderer and thief labeled himself in some way, it would be easy to run them down and probably there would be a great deal less crime in this world."

He stretched his arms over his head and yawned. "Well, I'm going to take a nap for an hour. You'd better do the same. Then we must dress for the housewarming. It looks as if we might have a real interesting time at Storm Brink Manor to-night."

CHAPTTR VIII.

FLINT WINS A TRICK.

IT was conceded by society reporters who described the dinner dance at Storm Brink Manor, that it was a "royal function." "An indescribably brilliant scene" was another of the phrases employed by several of the adulatory writers, and three of them gushed into "a dream of lovely women and knightly men in fairyland."

At the dinner there were enough to comfortably fill the palatial dining hall,

and afterwards in the ballroom when the rest of the company arrived there was such an assemblage of youth, beauty, and wealth as made Mrs. Rounders almost forget that she was not wearing the Cranbourne display, but was fain to content herself with a blaze of diamonds such as would have seemed incredible to her in the days before her husband was able to give her *carte blanche* in any jewelry emporium in the metropolis.

The house itself was worthy of its gorgeous inauguration as the country residence of a man many times a millionaire. No expense had been spared, and the taste and ability of the most distinguished architects and decorators had been obtained to make the edifice and grounds unique in loveliness as well as ultramodern convenience.

Seen from the river this night, every window ablaze with electricity, it was like a great crystal palace filled with the glorious fires of the gods.

J. Cranbourne Lynne, who sat at the right hand of the hostess at dinner and from time to time helped her invaluable, but unostentatiously, when she badly needed support on the slippery path of social usage, was at his best later in the ballroom, when the guests were glad of a little snappy entertainment in the intervals of dancing.

He sang to his own piano accompaniment, played the banjo, mystified his audience with really clever sleight of hand, and proved himself a pleasing and convincing ventriloquist. Mr. Lynne was easily the most popular person among all Mrs. Milton Rounders' distinguished guests.

It was just when he had finished his second interlude for the amusement of the company that Mr. Lynne, hot and a little fatigued, sought a quiet spot where he might enjoy a Turkish cigarette and fresh air.

He looked out on the great stone terrace outside the ballroom, but it was almost as crowded as the dancing floor

inside. So he did not go out there. Instead, he slipped out of the ballroom by one of the inner doors, threaded two great halls, and at last found himself in the courtyard at the side of the house where the van had come with its load of furniture, bringing also a ghastly mystery in the shape of the dead Boxer Bill.

It was quiet in this courtyard, and J. C. Lynne heaved a sigh of relief as he sat down on an ancient stone seat that had once been part of the furniture of a Roman forum, but which was made more comfortable now with cushions on the seat and silken draperies over its low, chipped back. Rounders had imported the relic, with many others, for his new country residence, at great cost. It was a peaceful spot.

There seemed to be no one about, and Mr. Lynne found it very restful to puff lazily at his cigarette while he leaned back on the cushions, catching the lilt of the music, softened by distance. He could see, in silhouette against the windows, the figures of those who were seeking coolness on the terrace, and he smiled with the cynicism of a world-weary man as he noted couples mooning off by themselves down the great marble steps to the close-cropped lawn under the tree avenues.

Suddenly he jumped to his feet at the sound of a footstep on the gravel behind him.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Lynne. I didn't mean to startle you."

"Mr. Thorndyke Flint!" exclaimed Lynne. "I beg *your* pardon. Don't know what made me fly up like that. Must be nervous. I came down here for a cigarette. May I offer you one?"

"Thanks!" replied Flint, as he took a cigarette from the extended gold case. "May I sit here?"

"I shall be delighted," returned Lynne. "And honored."

Thorndyke Flint's shrug was imperceptible to Lynne. The two seated

themselves upon the cushions of the Roman bench and the detective lighted his cigarette.

"That was a very clever performance you gave in the ballroom just now," he remarked. "The ventriloquism was particularly good, and your imitations of various public persons—actors and so on—was astounding in some respects. That impersonation where you had to reproduce a slight limp I thought simply perfect. I know that actor very well, and it is always interesting to see how he tries to hide his trifling lameness on the stage, giving way to it only in moments of strong dramatic stress. The artistic way you indicated that was admirable."

"Well, that was not altogether acting," answered Lynne carelessly. "One of my ankles is a little weak—a crack with a polo mallet last summer—but it does not often show. It isn't difficult for me to limp."

"I see," said Flint.

They smoked in silence for a few moments.

"Did you find your audience easy this evening?" suddenly asked the detective. "I mean, did they respond quickly to your efforts?"

"Fairly well," was the reply. "There is a wide difference in audiences, as all entertainers know, amateur as well as professional."

"You have had some more receptive than that to-night?"

"Well, yes," admitted Lynne. "I noticed this evening that sometimes they were a little slow in catching my 'points,' as if they were not giving me full attention."

"Why was that, do you think?"

"Impossible to say," returned Lynne, throwing away the end of his cigarette, taking another, and tendering the gold case to the detective. "It happens so sometimes."

"But," observed Thorndyke Flint, declining the cigarette case with a gesture,

"there usually is a reason for this sort of thing—if you can only find it."

J. Cranbourne Lynne had lighted a match for his new cigarette, and Thorndyke Flint regarded his face keenly in the sudden illumination.

"The reason is beyond me," declared Lynne as he threw the match away.

"Don't you think it possible it may have been in yourself?" asked the detective, still with his gaze fixed on the other's now darkened face. "Were you in your usual spirits, so that you could do your work with the desired spontaneity?"

"I'm afraid I hardly follow you," protested Lynne. "Don't I look well?"

"You said you were nervous when I came upon you suddenly just now."

"Overtired, after making a clown of myself for half an hour or more," was the smiling answer. "I didn't feel nervous in the ballroom."

"Yet there must have been some reason for the audience failing to respond promptly to such a good performance as you gave. And it *was* good. I can testify to that."

J. Cranbourne Lynne puffed swiftly at his cigarette for a few whiffs as if slightly irritated by the detective's persistence.

"Aren't you making too much of an insignificant matter, Mr. Flint?" he asked coldly.

"Sometimes the attitude of the host and hostess will affect the guests," continued the detective, unheeding the last speech. "Always, I may say. You know that Mr. and Mrs. Rounders are much perturbed over some private affairs of their own?"

"Why, no!" exclaimed Lynne in a tone of surprise. "What—?"

"Mr. Lynne," interrupted Thorndyke Flint, and his tone hardened, "Mr. Rounders has been annoyed by certain anonymous messages—three of them—and they are all signed Z. Do you by any

chance happen to know who this Z really is?"

He leaned forward so that he could look straight into the eye of the other by the uncertain light of the arc lamp some distance away. J. Cranbourne Lynne met the piercing gaze of the detective for perhaps three seconds. Then he looked away with assumed carelessness and examined the lighted end of his half-consumed cigarette.

"Why should you think I know who this mysterious person is?" he asked in a low voice. "Isn't your question rather peculiar, Mr. Flint?"

"Do you know who he is?"

"I must decline to answer until I know why I am put through this strange inquisition."

"That sounds rather like an admission."

"Not at all," rejoined Lynne. "Merely curiosity. Who wouldn't be curious, under the circumstances?"

"Especially when he may know the person about whom I am asking," said Thorndyke Flint sternly. "As to why I am trying to identify this mysterious Z, that can be explained in a very few words. He has written notes that contain veiled threats?"

"What kind of threats?"

"It isn't necessary to go into that now. I am trying to learn if you have any knowledge of a person who signs himself Z at any time?"

"Why should you think I know him? Why do you pitch on me in this extraordinary way? Really, Mr. Flint, I can't comprehend exactly."

"I pitch on you—if you prefer that way of putting it—because you are, so far as I am informed, the sole surviving member of the Cranbourne family."

"Interesting, but hardly explanatory," observed Lynne, puffing at his cigarette. "What have the Cranbournes to do with anonymous notes? Do you intimate that I may be this fellow Z you are so desirous of finding?"

J. Cranbourne Lynne dropped his cigarette into the gravel and deliberately stamped upon it. Then he raised his eyes with affected languidity to the detective's face and drawled: "And when you get Z, what will you do with him? The electric chair?"

"Possibly," returned Thorndyke Flint, in steady, merciles tones. "He is strongly suspected of highway robbery—and murder!"

"Good heavens!" said J. Cranbourne Lynne, white-faced and trembling.

CHAPTER IX.

AN UNEXPECTED COMPACT.

FROM an inner pocket Thorndyke Flint took the notes that had been sent by Z to Milton Rounders. They were folded together in an envelope.

"Here are the three Z messages, Mr. Lynne. Ever see them before?"

Lynne was obviously striving hard to pull himself together. He gave them a perfunctory glance and waved them away.

"Those notes are of no interest to me," he said shortly.

"You don't recognize the handwriting?"

"It seems to be disguised."

"That goes without saying," returned Thorndyke Flint. "But certain peculiarities of penmanship can generally be detected by experts no matter how hard the writer has worked to hide them."

"So I've always heard," said Lynne carelessly. "But why can't you let this poor devil of a Z go? What are a few anonymous notes, after all?"

"You haven't forgotten that he is under suspicion of grave crimes?"

"Suspicion? H'm!" Lynne was contemptuous.

"Murder among them!" Thorndyke reminded him.

"I've heard you say so," he said, turning sharply, as if the word had stung him. "But I don't believe Z had any-

thing to do with it. Why should I believe it?"

"Are you talking about the robbery or the murder?"

"Both," snapped out Lynne. "I don't believe the poor fellow knows anything about either of them." Lynne's voice became sharper. "Why should you suppose this Z is concerned in any way in this robbery and—and—killing you talk about?"

Thorndyke looked at him steadily, but J. Cranbourne Lynne preserved the insolent composure that had followed his agitation when he was told that Z was wanted for murder.

"You don't know, then," asked the detective, "that Mrs. Rounders was robbed of very valuable jewelry last night, and that a man who evidently was in the robbery plot was shot to death?"

"Where was it done?" queried J. Cranbourne Lynne. "In this house?"

Thorndyke Flint gave Mr. Lynne credit for well-simulated ingenuousness. Here was a man who had proved himself a good actor on the stage, and was equally talented in a drama of real life.

"I see that it will be necessary to go over the whole matter for your benefit," was Thorndyke Flint's response to Lynne's questioning. "In brief, then, Mr. Rounders was conveying from New York a costly collection of jewelry that Mrs. Rounders intended to wear this evening. When the vehicle in which it had been shipped reached Storm Brink, it was found that the gems were gone, and that a man, identified as William Brown, or Boxer Bill, who obviously had tried to steal them, lay dead by the side of the piece of furniture that had contained them, shot through the heart."

"Who do you think killed the man?" Lynne's voice shook slightly.

"A man who wanted that particular jewelry so badly that he was ready to commit cold-blooded murder for its sake," returned Thorndyke Flint impres-

sively. "A man who may have feared some great ill to himself if he did not gain possession of it," he added in still deeper tones, as he leaned forward to look the other in the eye.

"I don't understand the last part of your remarks," declared Lynne, with affected carelessness, sauntering aside from the detective's penetrating gaze. "Pardon me if I say that it sounds rather—er—absurd."

"Let us go a little further and you may understand better what I mean," rejoined Thorndyke Flint coldly.

"Go ahead!" was the nonchalant response.

Lynne plumped down again upon the cushions of the Roman bench. Flint quietly took a seat by his side.

"You are the grandson of Mrs. John Cranbourne, the famous society leader in New York some years ago?" began the detective.

"Yes, my mother was her daughter," Lynne looked a little puzzled.

"Mrs. John Cranbourne was the owner of a priceless collection of jewels—a wonderful pearl necklace, a diamond coronet, and an emerald of remarkable beauty and of great value."

"You mean the famous Cranbourne jewels," readily answered Lynne. "Everybody has heard of them. When my grandmother died she left them to my uncle, Irving Cranbourne. He was my mother's only brother. He died in the war—the last month of it—and the blighter left the collection to a ballet dancer he had been friendly with. She soon sold them, and they went from one place to another till they got into possession of Barrany's, the Fifth Avenue jewelers."

"You know who Barrany's sold them to?"

"Of course I know. I've always kept in touch with Barrany's—good friends of mine—so that I wouldn't lose sight of this precious Cranbourne junk. They were sold lately for about half a mil-

lion dollars to Mr. Milton Rounders." He stopped suddenly and his eyes widened. "You don't mean to say the Cranbourne jewels have been stolen?"

"I certainly do."

"Great scott! The Cranbourne jewels!"

"You seem surprised."

"Surprised!" almost shouted Lynne. "I'm paralyzed! *The Cranbourne jewels!* And you've been leading up to the insinuation that I might have stolen them, or hired some one to do it? Oh, heavens! What next?"

"The person who stole them no doubt killed Bill, the Boxer!" Flint reminded him. "You are aware that a person who instigates a crime is equally guilty with the actual perpetrator?"

"Don't talk rot, please!" snapped out Lynne. "This Bill what's-his-name was undoubtedly a common crook—member of some gang that had planned to steal these jewels, and Bill was killed because he tried to double cross his pals."

"Do you *know* that?" asked the detective sharply.

"I don't actually *know* it, of course. How should I? But it's clear enough. It could hardly have been any other way." He got up and walked to and fro. Then he stopped short. "Look here, Mr. Flint!" He paused, as if undecided how to go on.

"Yes?" prompted Thorndyke Flint.

"What I was going to say is that it will be easy for me to prove my innocence of this horrible crime or any participation in it. I wouldn't take the trouble to say this if it were not plain that somehow you have decided to connect me with it. Most ridiculous thing that ever happened to me, I assure you." The man's voice broke with suppressed ire.

"Not if you are the writer of the Z notes."

J. Cranbourne Lynne passed this over. "Of course if this implied accusation against me is to be taken seriously," he

said, "I can easily prove that I was not out of New York last night; therefore could not have killed a man near Storm Brink Manor. As for this Bill who was found dead, I never heard of him. That disposes of that. Where was the man killed?"

"In a furniture van."

"A furniture van? Did it take one of those big machines to carry the jewelry? But never mind about that. This Cranbourne collection! It must not be lost. There is a family belief that these infernal jewels must never get away from——" He stopped. "But that is only an ancient legend that would not interest you. You'd laugh at it. So would most people. But I am a Cranbourne, and——"

"I know the Cranbourne legend," interrupted Thorndyke Flint. "You believe it to be true that if the jewels go out of the possession of the family at any time for the space of five years, it will bring evil to all members of it still living?"

"Of course I do," declared Lynne emphatically. "So would you if you were a Cranbourne. I meant to speak to Mr. Rounders about it this evening if I could find an opportunity. But that secretary, Willis, was always in the way, and I didn't care to bring up such a matter before him, or any stranger."

"You mean that you would offer to buy the jewels of Mr. Rounders?"

"Lord, no! I don't want them. I could raise the cash, I dare say. But what use would the stuff be to me? I have no wife, and I couldn't wear it myself. But there's a distant cousin, Gertrude Cranbourne—whose husband is Hall Stegleman. He could well afford to buy them; I haven't seen him, or her either, for that matter. As a Cranbourne this legend affects Mrs. Stegleman as much as it does me. But what's the use of talking if the jewelry is gone?"

Thorndyke Flint had been listening at-

tentively, and his brain worked toward a definite end the while.

"Mr. Lynne," he said evenly, "it appears from what you have just said that you are vitally interested in getting these Cranbourne jewels back."

"I certainly am," broke in Lynne. "I would do anything to recover them. In fact, they *must* be found."

"Good! Now, if you are willing to remain at Storm Brink Manor for a few days, giving me what assistance you can in searching for them, it will enable me to check up on your assertions of innocence, and may also lead me to the identity of this mysterious Z, who is most assuredly connected in some way with the robbery and murder, even if entirely guiltless of the actual crime."

J. Cranbourne Lynne stared into the depths of the detective's grave eyes. What he saw there convinced him that it would be to his decided advantage to accept the proposition, and that, whatever might come up, he was sure of that treatment appreciated by all men, familiarly known as "a square deal."

He put out his hand. "I'll do it, Mr. Flint!"

The detective returned the hand clasp. "Very well, Mr. Lynne. You know, of course, that you are a welcome guest at Storm Brink Manor so long as you choose to stay. I will see Mr. Rounders and tell him privately of the compact we have just made. Now, if you will permit me to make a suggestion, I think it would be well if you return to the ballroom. So prominent a guest as Mr. J. Cranbourne Lynne will surely be missed."

"I suppose I ought to go back," was Lynne's rather weary response. "But you can easily suppose it's going to bore me for the remainder of the evening."

He sauntered away and went into the house by one door, just as Frank Judson, who, with Loydall, had come from another. Judson came over to speak to Thorndyke Flint.

CHAPTER X.

COMPLICATIONS.

RATHER to Flint's surprise it was Loydall, the self-confessed crook, who ran ahead of Judson and spoke to the detective first. Loydall was much excited over something. The question he flung forth was challenging in its bluntness.

"Who's that guy what jest left you, boss?"

"What guy?" Thorndyke Flint asked.

"That tall, big fellow, in soup-and-fish togs, what went in that door over there. I've seen him before."

"Indeed?" returned Flint, suddenly interested. "Where?"

Frank Judson had joined them by this time, and he gave Loydall's arm an admonitory pinch.

"Not so loud, Loydall," he warned. "If you have anything to say to Mr. Flint, put on the soft pedal. You know what I told you."

"All right," assented Loydall, dropping his voice. "But I wanted to let the boss here know what I seen last night."

"Last night?" repeated Flint. "Where did you see him?"

"Gittin' out of that furniture van," was the startling reply, whisper though it was.

"Are you sure?" put in Judson.

"Pretty nigh," declared Loydall, with a dogged shake of his head. "It was this way. I——"

"Stop!" ordered Thorndyke Flint. "Jud, go up to my room. Take him there. I'll join you directly."

Frank Judson, pushing Loydall before him, went into the house by the doorway from which they had emerged, while Thorndyke Flint made his way to the billiard room, where he had last seen Milton Rounders.

Loydall's blurted-out assertion that he had seen J. Cranbourne Lynne getting out of the furniture van the night be-

fore might or might not be truthful. At all events it was important enough to induce Flint to go directly to Milton Rounders and ask him, as the host, to formally invite Mr. Lynne to spend a few days at Storm Brink Manor, and particularly to make sure he remained there that night.

Rounders was the kind of man who soon tires of music, dancing, and ball-room feminine chatter. His idea of real pleasure was to sit in a comfortable leather-covered chair and smoke, in the society of men of similar tastes.

So he was still in the billiard room, with a perfecto between his teeth, his white waistcoat unbuttoned at the bottom, and his whole aspect that of a man who had thrown off social stiffness and was resolved to enjoy himself rationally.

A snappy game of billiards was in progress on one table and a hullabaloo of pool on another. Mr. Rounders was seated where he could give his attention to one or the other or both. He looked the picture of contentment as Flint approached him.

"Hello, Flint!" was his boisterous greeting. "Why aren't you dancing? Come in here for a smoke, I suppose? All right! Park yourself on this chair by me. Glad to have you here."

Thorndyke Flint spoke in a low, confidential voice. "Will you invite J. Cranbourne Lynne to stay here for a week?"

"Sure, Flint! A month, if he'll stay. But, how comes it that you are saying this to me? What's the big idea?"

"Seems queer, perhaps," said the detective without a smile. "But I've a reason. It's about the Cranbourne jewels."

Milton Rounders jumped from his seat as if some one had struck him. "Great guns, Flint!" he spluttered. "I was trying to forget that whole ruckus. Mrs. R. has cooled down and seems satisfied with the rocks she's wearing, and I'd made up my mind to leave the rest to you. That is, about the Cranbourne

jewels. What is this about Lynne? What has he to do with them?"

"He's a rather clever fellow," answered the detective. "I think he may be able to help in running down the gang who stole the jewelry and killed Bill, the Boxer."

"I don't care a fiddler's hang about Bill, the Boxer!" blurted out Milton Rounders. "But if he can put us on the track of those shiners, let him go ahead with you, and more power to both of you. Hello! Here he is! Hey! Lynne! Come over here!"

Rounders prided himself on never having forsaken his old-time rough-and-ready manner, and he bellowed to J. Cranbourne as if he were talking across a railroad yard.

Thorndyke Flint saw that Lynne was going over to join Rounders, so he slipped away, and a minute or two afterward was stepping out of the elevator on the third floor to go to his own room. Judson and Loydall were waiting for him.

"Now, Loydall, let's have your story," directed Flint curtly, as soon as he was inside. "You say you saw the gentleman talking to me to-night get out of the furniture van. Do you remember what you told me in New York? You said that the man who left the van was a stranger to you."

"So he was, boss. But there was something about him that I remembered to-night, when I was standing with Mr. Judson gettin' some fresh air at the back door, after working in the kitchen all the evening."

"Go on."

Loydall had been sitting primly in a chair against the wall, with Thorndyke Flint and Judson facing him some distance away. He got up now and gesticulated dramatically as he made his relation.

"This guy what jumped out of the van was a tall fellow, and big all over, an' I seen he handled hisself easy, like

a box fighter with extra good footwork. Then I piped the limp."

"I understand," observed Flint. "Get down to the main point—how you came to associate him with the gentleman in the courtyard this evening."

"It was because he was a little lame," said Loydall earnestly. "That an' his general look. There was something about him different from most men. I believe I'd have knowed this bird to-night even if he hadn't limped. But when he went dottin' across the yard I *knowed* I'd seen him last night."

"Pretty thin, Loydall," commented Thorndyke Flint. "What if there was actually a resemblance, do you expect me to believe that you'd pick out one of Mr. Rounders' guests, a gentleman who stands high in New York society, as a holdup unless you'd some other very strong reason for doing so?"

"S'help me—"

"Wait a moment!"

Thorndyke Flint had risen from his chair and walked over to the cringing Loydall. The detective took him by the shoulders and swung him around so that his face was in the full glow of the light.

"Now, Loydall, tell me this," he ordered severely. "Who pointed out this gentleman, Mr. J. Cranbourne Lynne, as a man who had been sending threatening letters to Mr. Rounders, and who might be the person who had robbed the furniture van of those jewels and killed Bill, the Boxer? Come! Out with it!"

Loydall possessed all the cunning and dogged obstinacy of his kind. But he cowered under the frown of the famous detective. He could not but tell the truth, no matter how much it might be against his will. Still he temporized as well as he could, stubborn to the last.

"Why do you think any one pointed him out, boss?"

"Don't catechize me!" thundered Thorndyke Flint. "Answer my question."

"Well, it was—it was—that bird what works in Mr. Rounders' room," faltered Loydall. "His secretary, I reckon he is."

"Mr. Willis?"

"I—I—dunno."

"Don't lie!" warned Thorndyke. "Is that whom you mean?"

"Who?" came the slippery return.

"Mr. Willis!" shouted Thorndyke Flint, giving the prevaricating Loydall a shake. "Was that the person who told you there was suspicion of Mr. Lynne?"

Loydall looked all round as a hunted animal will seek a means of escape. There was no chance of dodging the question any longer, however. So he replied sullenly, in a voice just above a whisper. "Yes, I guess that's the man—Mr. Willis."

"How did you come to have any conversation with him at all? Did you go out of the kitchen to his room, or meet him about the lower part of the house?"

"Why, he came to where I was polishing some copper pans in the back kitchen. He knowed I'd been brought here by Mr. Judson, and he told me he was glad I'd come to help find out who croaked Bill Brown."

"How did he know anything about you?" queried Judson, breaking in for the first time. "You didn't tell me that."

"I would if you'd asked me," replied Loydall.

"Was that all Mr. Willis told you?" asked Thorndyke Flint. "That there was suspicion that Mr. Lynne might know something about Z, if he wasn't Z, himself? And that it was likely that Z was in that furniture van job?"

"He told me to keep a sharp eye on this Mr. Lynne when I came where he was. He said if I could put anything on him, it would please you."

"Why should it please me?" demanded Flint. "Why did he think so?"

"He didn't tell me. He said he wanted to see the mystery cleared up, because it might lead to gettin' back the shiners,

as well as sendin' the man who killed Bill, the Boxer, to the chair."

Thorndyke Flint brought the interview to an abrupt conclusion when his telephone bell rang and the butler said, over the house wire, that Chief Peppers would like to see Mr. Flint at once, if possible. He was waiting in the garage. Mr. Flint's own man, Norton, had telephoned from there, he was instructed to say.

The detective replied that he would go down to the garage immediately. Then to Judson he said: "Watch this Loydall closer than ever, Jud. And see that no one speaks to him except on kitchen business. Understand?"

"I surely do, chief."

"And if he doesn't behave himself," added Thorndyke Flint, with a menacing look at the whining Loydall, "don't hesitate to use the dark cellar I spoke of before."

"Shall I put him there now?" asked Judson rather eagerly. "It might save trouble."

"No," replied Flint. "Give him a chance to show that he can behave decently. I have an idea he will be good now, for a while, at all events."

Then Thorndyke Flint went down in the elevator to see what Chief of Police Peppers wanted with him.

CHAPTER XI.

ON ANOTHER TRAIL.

THE chief of police did not wear his magnificent blue-and-gold regalia this time. He was in an ordinary business suit, but a tall Stetson hat of the type common on the Western plains set off his civilian clothes and indicated something of his official dignity. Chief Peppers never forgot, or allowed others to forget, that he was the autocratic head of the Grunekill police department, and that any automobilist who went through that village faster than twelve miles an hour would surely come into collision

with the rigid Grunekill law, as solemnly established by municipal ordinance.

When Thorndyke Flint entered the garage, Chief Peppers gave him a military salute of a commendably snappy character.

The detective responded with a touch of his hat brim, and then took Chief Peppers' extended hand.

"Can you come over to police headquarters with me, Mr. Flint?" were Chief Peppers' first words after the greeting.

Ray Norton, standing behind the chief, grinned at the pompous description of the Grunekill police station as "headquarters," but a slight frown from Thorndyke Flint crushed his mirth.

"Something new, chief?" asked Flint.

"Yes. We have that death car."

"Death car?" repeated Thorndyke Flint. He was bewildered for a moment, but he knew that Chief Peppers was a close student of the "yellow" city papers, wherein such expressions are common in murder cases, and he quickly understood. "You mean the motor car that was following the furniture van and which disappeared?"

"That's it," returned the chief. "It's in our barn, and I want you to look it over."

"How do you know it's the death car, as you call it?" asked Flint.

"We found it abandoned in the woods, Isn't that pretty good evidence? I think it is. Look here! And I can take you over to Grunekill in less than half an hour."

"I'll go as soon as I get a light overcoat," was the detective's response. "But I'll take Mr. Rounders' roadster, so that I can get back without troubling you. I know that road to Grunekill. Three miles down the State highway and turn off to the right at the first four corners. Isn't that it?"

"Quite right," confirmed Chief Peppers, rather surprised. "You know this part of the country well, Mr. Flint."

"I've been in this neighborhood before," returned the detective. "If you will go ahead, I'll get to Grunekill as soon afterward as I can."

As Chief of Police Peppers drove out of the large garage in his dinky little two-passenger car, Ray Norton spoke softly to his employer.

"We'll have to drive at a walk all the way, or we'll run him down. I'm glad you don't have to ride with him, chief. I'll go in and get your overcoat. The car is all ready to go."

Ray had already started out of the garage when his employer called him back.

"Stay here, Ray. I'll get my overcoat, myself."

"Gee! A guy never knows what the chief is going to do," muttered Ray. "I could have gone up to his room for that coat all right. But he does like to do things himself. I reckon that's one reason he generally makes good!"

Turning this bit of philosophy over in his mind, Ray Norton found Thorndyke Flint back with him in what seemed an impossibly short time. Moreover, he was not alone, he had brought Loydall with him.

"Loydall is going with us, Ray," said Thorndyke calmly. "He will identify this car if it's the same one that he used."

"I suppose he'll know it again?"

"Know it ag'in?" burst out Loydall. "I should say I will. An' if it's mine, the boss here says I can bring it right away. It ain't act'ally my car, and if it's lost I'll have to make good to the man what owns it. S'help me——"

"Get in, Loydall!" interrupted the detective.

The gangster obeyed, and Thorndyke Flint took his place at the wheel, while Ray Norton squeezed in on the other side of Loydall.

The night air was refreshing, and the glare of the strong headlights cut a fine swath through the blackness. Soon they

turned off from the State road at the before-mentioned four corners, and were spinning along a narrow thoroughfare which had been cut through a heavy wood. Trees threw their branches over the road, interlacing in many places and shutting off the starlit sky altogether. On either side was an apparently impenetrable thicket.

"Great place for a stick-up!" observed Loydall. Then, catching himself quickly: "At least, that's what some guys might think. I'm going straight!"

For one swift second Thorndyke Flint glanced at him. Then he drove ahead a little faster, while Ray involuntarily grasped Loydall by the elbow. The gangster's assertion of rectitude had made a bad impression on both his fellow riders.

"Here's Grunekill," said the detective ten minutes later. "And there is some one waving a lantern. That must be police headquarters."

Thorndyke Flint's surmise was correct, and it was Chief Peppers himself who was standing in front of his official edifice with a lantern to guide them to the place.

"There's the flivver, Mr. Flint," he announced, as the four of them entered a barn at the back of the building. "Let me switch on the lights."

As he did so, illuminating the interior in every part, Loydall darted forward to an old tumble-down muddy car, with bent mudguards, a broken headlight, and flapping, torn curtains, and exclaimed excitedly: "That's my car!"

"Sure of it?" asked Peppers challengingly.

"Sure? I can swear to it. Why, I drove that car all the way from New York last night, an' I'd been in it before. Of course I'm sure. A guy knows his own, don't he?"

"You said it *wasn't* your own car," remarked Thorndyke Flint.

"It ain't my own in the way of my bein' its real owner," explained Loydall

laboriously. "But it's the car I drove after that van last night, and it's the one I parked down the road when I went up to Storm Brink to see what kind of a game had been pulled on me. Oh, that's the car right enough."

He was going to step into it when Thorndyke Flint pulled him back.

"Wait a moment, Loydall! I want to look inside that car before you get in."

"All right, boss!" Loydall's tone was humble as it always was when he spoke directly to the dreaded detective. "But it's my car."

Thorndyke Flint bent over the car with his flash and magnifying glass.

"Find anything?" asked Peppers. "I suppose there are some bits of evidence?"

"There are, chief, of course," returned the detective. "Finger prints! Can you take them from the wheel and sides of the car? I see at least three different thumb marks," he added as he looked through the strong magnifying glass he always carried. "Look!"

He straightened up.

Chief of Police Peppers ponderously took the glass from Thorndyke's hand and looked at each thumb print pointed out to him.

"Sure, Mr. Flint!" he said at last. "Now the question is how we are going to compare them. I haven't any fingerprint records at headquarters in Grunekill. What do you think?"

"I am rather surprised and disappointed, chief," replied Thorndyke, so gravely that the pompous Peppers had no suspicion that there might be concealed irony in the detective's protestations. "I should have supposed so well-conducted a police headquarters as this at Grunekill, especially under the command of so able an officer, would have had all the latest and most improved machinery for the detection of crime and criminals."

Chief Peppers swelled and took off
4D—DS

his tall Stetson for the convenience of wiping his forehead in a stately manner with a no-less-stately bandanna.

"We are arranging for a complete Bertillon outfit," he said, lying so fluently that he almost believed it himself. "The Grunekill municipal council have the matter before them now."

CHAPTER XII.

FLINT ANSWERS A CALL.

THERE was a pause for a few seconds, during which Chief Peppers regarded Thorndyke Flint hopefully. If the renowned detective could not help him in this unexpected dilemma, who could?

"The only thing I can see is for me to take the car to Storm Brink, where I can examine it at my leisure and take thumb prints of any one I may suspect," said Thorndyke at last. "I will keep you informed if I learn anything you can use."

Chief Peppers heaved a sigh of relief. The case was weighing on him painfully. It was his first murder.

"That looks like a very good suggestion," he said. "But we will go over the car a little further first, don't you think?"

"Certainly. Now tell me how and where this car was found, please."

"It was in a wood not far from Grunekill," replied Peppers. "You drove through it on your way here—a very dark piece of road, with trees overhead. Perhaps you remember?"

Thorndyke Flint nodded. "I noticed it. Who found the car?"

"A farm hand. He had set some traps in the woods and was looking them over this evening, when he came across the car in a swamp, with brushwood piled on it. From its appearance I should say that it had been driven into the swamp purposely, to get rid of it."

"How long had it been there?"

"I don't know."

"Had the farm hand or any one else seen it on the road, with a driver?"

"Not that I can learn so far. The farm hand—Sloggins is his name—telephoned me at headquarters, and I went with one of my men, Schrink, and looked it over. I found that the engine and gear were all right but that the gas tank was empty. So, after making inquiries of everybody in the neighborhood without result, I found that it could be pulled out of the swamp under its own power, and I drove it to headquarters myself. We got some gas from the farmer."

"Anything been touched in it since?"
"No."

"May I look at the bottom of your shoe, chief?" asked Flint as he lifted up the seat cushion and took out the gasoline measure.

The chief's shoe measured less than twelve inches in length and only four in width. Moreover, there were certain nails in it that would have left marks, but which were not in the big footprint on the rubber mat.

Thorndyke considered. "You'd better get a death certificate from one of your doctors here, and, if no one claims the body, bury it some time to-morrow." He turned to Loydall. "Unless you know of some one who——"

"Wait a moment!" interposed Chief Peppers. "I've been so fussed up over this thing that I'd forgot. There was a man here this afternoon who identified the dead man as his brother."

"Buck!" burst involuntarily from Loydall.

"We let him see the remains, and he was positive it was William Brown. He said his own name was Buckley Brown. He had come from New York, and he rode from the station here in the stage."

"How did he know where the dead man was?" asked Thorndyke.

"He said the men with the furniture van had told him in New York all about

the killing, and that his brother had been brought to Grunekill. So he got on a train and came here right away. He's a desperate-looking fellow, and I was inclined to lock him up. But I hadn't anything on him, and I had to let him go."

"Where is he now?"

"At the American House, in Grunekill. That's where he went after leaving headquarters. I had him followed by my men. That was only proper police work, of course."

"Of course," agreed Flint. "He's going to attend to his brother's funeral?"

"That's what he said."

"He ain't likely to leave Grunekill for a day or two, is he?" It was the plaintive, terror-stricken tones of Loydall that broke in here.

"Not without letting the police department know first," replied Chief Peppers severely. "I've warned the hotel people. I don't like the looks of him, and there might be something turn up I can hold him on. What do you say, Mr. Flint?"

"His record is not good in New York. Don't interfere with him so long as he stays in town and behaves himself. If he kicks over the traces in any way, put him in a cell and enter a charge of 'suspicious character' against him."

Thorndyke spoke emphatically.

"The safest thing would be to lock him up right away," blurted out Loydall.

"Well, it is evident that you did not make that footprint in the car, chief," went on Thorndyke, without heeding Loydall. "So you'd better be on the watch for the big man, as I've told you. Meanwhile, I'll drive this car to Storm Brink myself. Then I'll know there will be no careless blotting out of any evidence that might help."

"I suppose that is the best thing to do," concurred Peppers hesitatingly, for he didn't like the idea of so important a case slipping out of his hands after

all. "You'll keep me posted on every-thing, Mr. Flint?"

"On everything that it is necessary for you to know," answered the detective. "You may depend on that. Norton, you and Loydall go back in the roadster. I'll start first. I may have trouble with this car. If I do you can help me when you come up."

"All right, gov'nor," responded Ray. "She don't look very sound, for a fact."

"She's all right," put in Loydall. "I ought to know. I druv her from New York. You couldn't kill that baby by jest runnin' her into a swamp. No, sir."

When Thorndyke Flint had the flivver fairly under way he was inclined to agree with Loydall as to her merits. He had waited, after leaving the barn, to make sure that Loydall was sitting close to Ray in the roadster, so that he could not easily get out before he was grabbed. He also saw that Ray, at the wheel, had fine control of the machine.

Then, with a parting admonition to his young assistant to keep as close behind him all the way as he could without actually bumping into him, he had set out on his return trip to Storm Brink Manor.

It was when Thorndyke Flint had reached the particularly dark part of the road already referred to, where there was a thicket on either side and trees arched overhead, that a series of piercing blasts from a klaxon behind made him bring the car to a quick, violent stop.

Without realizing it, Flint had been pushing his battered car to almost the limits of her engine capacity. He had been doing thirty miles an hour at least. So, when he turned in his seat, to look back, he saw that the headlights of the big roadster were a quarter of a mile distant, if not more.

The sound of the klaxon bellowed through the still night air as if it were close at hand. That it came from Ray's car he knew at once. There is a different tone to every motor horn, as is well

known. But, aside from that, the detective felt sure there was no other car following him along that lonely road at that hour of night.

There was no room to turn around on the narrow highway. If he had tried it he hardly could have avoided going into a ditch on one side or the other. But the bellow of the klaxon was undoubtedly an S O S. Ray Norton was in some sort of trouble.

Flint was an expert in the management of all types of automobiles, and down went his foot on the reverse.

The weather-beaten, time-worn old car responded gallantly. She backed at a good speed, while the detective, his eye on the road before him, kept her straight even though he was not able to see where he was going.

Still the klaxon kept up its raucous cry for help.

There must be something desperate going on behind him, but he derived comfort from the fact that the klaxon did keep on. It indicated that Ray had the use of one of his hands or arms, anyway.

At last the powerful headlights on the car behind shed their glow on Thorndyke's wind shield. Still keeping his flivver backing, he turned his head and saw that the roadster was only about twenty yards behind.

"Great guns!" he muttered. "What the dickens is going on back there!"

Ten more yards of backing and he shut off his engine and jumped out.

Decidedly there was something to see.

What he saw was *three* men in the roadster, and all of them in the throes of a mighty battle.

By this time the blasts of the klaxon had become intermittent, with marked pauses, as if Ray could only get at it now and then, but it was not until he reached the roadster and leaped upon the running board that Thorndyke Flint could see just what was going on.

Then he made out a burly figure, with

its back to him, and he knew that the fellow had Loydall by the throat, while Ray Norton was doing his best to save the little gangster from being choked to death.

And the man who was doing his best to throttle him was none other than Buck Brown, brother of Bill, the Boxer, who had been killed in the furniture van the night before.

To be continued in next week's issue of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE.

Are You One of the Lucky Six?



As promised in the May 12, 1923, issue, we have selected six letters and finger prints from those sent to compete in the contest, and these six finger prints will be reproduced in next week's issue. If you think you recognize one of these finger prints as yours, send us a duplicate of that finger print, numbering it, as the finger print is numbered in the magazine.

If you are correct in thus distinguishing one of the finger prints printed in next week's issue as yours, we will take pleasure, as promised, in sending you a check for twenty-five dollars.



Don't Miss Next Week's Issue.

"Keep Off the Grass"

64 *Kenneth Duane Whipple*

Author of "Bad Medicine," etc.

BITING her lip, Vera Simmons paused irresolutely in the dim third-floor corridor of the ancient brick building occupied by the Department of Welfare. Her first impulse, when she had spied Isabelle Moore's new diamond ring lying forgotten on the paper-towel rack in the washroom, had been to restore it to its owner. Indeed she had picked it up and dropped it in the pocket of her short plaid skirt with that intention. Despite her jealousy she had had no thought of keeping it even temporarily.

But now, halfway down the corridor, she drew the ring from her pocket. How would it have looked on her finger, if Claude Robinson had given it to her instead? She had not had a good look at it on the day that Isabelle had worn it proudly to the office. Surely there was no harm in just trying it on for a moment.

With a swift glance up and down the deserted hallway, she stepped back into a shallow recess in the wall near the elevator and slipped the ring on her finger. It slid on with a little difficulty; her fingers were thicker and less graceful than Isabelle's.

The unshaded bulb in the ceiling opposite her niche blazed down upon the gem, throwing dancing sparklets along the dingy wall, as she turned her hand admiringly. She remembered hearing Isabelle say that Claude had taken the stone—a full carat and a half, pure white—from a ring belonging to his mother, to be reset in flat, engraved platinum for Isabelle. In the new setting, its brilliance enhanced by the art

of the modern worker in precious metals, it must be worth four or five hundred dollars.

At the sound of a footstep she started and tugged hastily at the ring. It stuck on the large joint of her finger and would not budge. What if Isabelle in search of the ring were coming down the hallway?

The steps, echoing loudly in her apprehensive ears, came nearer. With a last futile tug Vera Simmons thrust her hand behind her, sliding it upward beneath her close-fitting black sweater, as if adjusting her belt. Casually, feigning ignorance of observation, she stepped out into the corridor, walking abstractedly with lowered head.

Almost immediately, reassured by an upward glance, she withdrew her hand. It was only one of the guard—the blinking, nearsighted one with the yellowish-white mustache. There was no need to hide it from him.

Vera Simmons walked the length of the corridor, her progress growing slower and more hesitant. Then, with a quick look over her shoulder, she turned and retraced her steps, the ring still sparkling on her finger.

She told herself that she was only going back to the washroom to remove it with soap. But in the flighty, irresponsible brain beneath the bobbed yellow hair, the subtle leaven of temptation was already at work.

The washroom was still deserted. A few flakes of powdered soap from the glass container, rubbed to a foamy lather, served to ease the ring over the stubby joint.

It lay wet and glistening in her palm. Though not set as a solitaire, she knew that it was none the less a symbol of engagement. Under seal of secrecy Isabelle had confided in her, ignorant that thenceforth in her heart the other had hated her for snaring Claude, despised Claude for allowing himself to be snared, and bitterly resented the scheme of things which had kept her in a government office, where the few scattered males were either married, or fat, bald, and homely. Claude had been the only exception, and now Claude had fallen for Isabelle!

"I've a darned good mind to keep it!" she told herself defiantly. "Teach her a good lesson—her and Claude, too!"

If she took the ring, her conscience tardily warned her, she would be breaking the law.

"Well, what of it?" she muttered. "That don't mean anything nowadays, anyhow. Lots of folks break more of 'em than that—and get away with it, too!"

How could they tell who had taken it? A dozen clerks might have been there since Isabelle. And there was always the charwoman to blame.

But, best of all, she herself was leaving Washington the first of the month. Her resignation had already been acted upon; no suspicion could attach to her departure. Once back in her home town, up among the Alleghenies, she would be able to wear the ring without the slightest fear of detection.

Vera Simmons had been one of the many attracted to Washington in 1917, during the height of the demand for war workers. She had accepted a temporary appointment at random, caring little what her work was; considering rather the good pay, the short hours, the dances, the movies, and jazz. The gradual weeding-out process, continuing methodically since the armistice, had reached her surely, if tardily, as it had reached many others of her type.

Well, let them ask for her resignation! When she left the Department of Welfare she would take with her something worth while! With sudden decision she thrust the ring back in her pocket and folding it in her lace-bordered handkerchief. Then, a nervous flush struggling through the powder on either sallow cheek, she hurried back down the hall to her room.

Seated in the corner, she was partially screened from the rest of the room by a row of metal filing cabinets. Unobserved she whisked the handkerchief into the top right-hand drawer of her desk. Through the linen's lacy folds her fingers felt the hard, polished circle of the platinum band.

She glanced at a desk halfway across the room, where a dark head nodded rhythmically above a galloping typewriter. It was obvious that Isabelle had not yet noticed her loss. If only she failed to miss the ring until the fourthirty dismissal bell!

Vera Simmons set about her own duties, increasingly watchful of Isabelle's desk, as the short afternoon waned. The hands of the electric clock above the door had inched jerkily forward to four-ten, when she saw Isabelle look down, then give a sudden start. The next instant, her face pale, she had risen and hurried from the room.

"Now she's remembered where she left it," muttered Vera Simmons. "When she comes back——"

The next ten minutes dragged interminably. For all her apprehension she was almost glad when the door flew open, and Isabelle entered, a panic-stricken look on her face.

Vera Simmons dropped her eyes to her work. She rather felt than saw the hurried conversation between Isabelle and Claude. The latter, his pink cheeks growing even pinker, seemed to be urging some course of action on her.

It still lacked five minutes of fourthirty when Isabelle rose hastily and

with obvious determination. With a gasp Vera Simmons realized that Isabelle was going to Mr. Baldwin's desk! Mr. Baldwin, their bald-headed, hatchet-faced chief, whose stern administration of his section held them all in fear.

She was talking rapidly and earnestly. The next moment Mr. Baldwin, his hatchet face grimmer than ever, had pulled over the branch telephone and was speaking incisively into the mouth-piece.

What if he were telephoning to the police? For all she knew, an officer might be sent to ferret out the thief, then and there. The police station was just up the street; she passed it daily on her way to work. Had she been seen? Was she suspected? In a flurry of panic she opened her desk and thrust the handkerchief farther back in the drawer.

In three minutes the bell would ring. But if the guards at the door had been ordered to prevent clerks from leaving the building—if a search had been ordered of their desks, their persons—

Of a sudden she knew that her courage would never be equal to the ordeal of descending the stairs with the ring in her pocket and walking out past the guard—perhaps into the arms of a policeman. Neither would it do to leave the ring in her desk. A search might be made of the room after they had gone.

Her frantic glance fell upon a ball of stout cord on the corner of her desk. Into her mind leaped a story she had read—or was it a movie?—where the room, searched inch by inch, had yielded nothing. But just outside the window, hanging from a projection in the wall—

Vera Simmons, her breath coming faster, unrolled the ball of cord, reeled off a length, and severed it with a swift clip of the shears. Jerking open her drawer she looped one end through the ring and tied it securely.

Crumpling handkerchief, ring, and cord in her cold, trembling hand, she rose and crossed the window beyond her desk, its casement open to the warm spring breezes which wafted the odor of greenery across the ellipse. Beyond the trees a fresh-turned patch of earth, soft brown against the softer green, was being seeded down and placarded.

In the mirror on the wall between the windows she watched the reflection of the room behind her. No one was looking. She let the ring fall outside the window, holding fast to one end of the cord. Then leaning out, as if to regard the cloud-banked sky, she looked for some projection on which to hang the free end.

Her eyes passed vainly along the surface. Almost overbalancing, she leaned farther out, scanning the bricks. There was within her reach not so much as an irregularity on their smooth surfaces.

Behind her the bell rang with deafening clamor. The clerks, rising with varying degrees of alacrity, began to don their outer wraps. Around the edges of the long room Thomas, the colored messenger, was already drawing the shades.

The mirror showed her the fast emptying room. Her left hand, just inside the sill of the open window, still held the end of the cord; her head, half turned, conveyed the impression that she was looking out across the green sward toward the white column of the Monument. Her thoughts were flying like mad. She must pull up the ring and devise some other place to hide it. After the others had gone—

"Oh, Vera!—the most terrible thing has happened!"

Vera Simmons wheeled, thrusting both her hands instinctively behind her. Isabelle, her soft voice trembling with grief, was coming toward her, one hand raised to tuck in the dark hair under the floppy black hat, the other stretched out appealingly.

"Vera, did you know—my ring's been stolen? I left it in the washroom, and now it's gone."

Isabelle's eyes filled with tears. She fumbled blindly for her handkerchief.

Gripped behind her, Vera Simmons' hands shook so violently that she feared she would lose her hold on the cord. She could not pull up the ring; but, unless she did, she could not leave the window. Trapped, helpless, she stood rooted to the spot.

Isabelle, oblivious to her agitation, was relating the circumstances of her loss. Her trustful nature entertained not the slightest suspicion of the other's antipathy. Across her shoulder Vera Simmons scanned the room—at last empty, save for themselves and Thomas. The negro was approaching along the wall, darkening the room, as he lowered the shades.

Would Isabelle never have done with her silly tears and repetitions?

Her clenched hand, moving mechanically along the window sill, encountered the corner of a postal guide. At first this suggested nothing to her. Then with sudden inspiration she thrust the cord beneath the bulky volume. It seemed to hold, but she dared not release her grip unless forced to do so. She moved a little farther out from the window, testing the tension cautiously with her left hand. With the other she gave Isabelle's shoulder a hypocritical pat.

"There, kid—it'll turn up all right," she forced herself to say, the words sounding hollow and unconvincing even in her own ears. But Isabelle, eager for sympathy, looked up with quick gratitude.

"Oh, do you think so, Vera? I do so hope you're right!"

"Sure—you'll find it. Run along now and forget it."

Isabelle dabbed at her eyes with her moist handkerchief. A determined smile struggled through the tears.

"All right, I'll try to. Say, listen, Vera: come along and walk up to Woodson and Leacock's to-night with me, won't you? There's a suit I don't know whether to get or not. Do you think brown would be—"

Behind Vera Simmons a dark shadow fell. Almost simultaneously there sounded a grinding click, and a violent tug twitched the cord from her fingers.

She turned sharply and gasped, her face so white that Isabelle readily believed Vera's subsequent explanation that she had seen a man run into by an automobile.

For Thomas, now busy hooding the typewriter in the corner, had lowered the window sash behind her and locked it securely, jerking the cord from her hand in his heedless passage along the wall.

And the end of the slender line, by which was suspended a five-hundred-dollar diamond, had vanished from beneath the paper-covered postal guide on the inner sill.

II.

The routine of one of Uncle Sam's night watchmen, particularly at such a prosaic post as the Department of Welfare, as a rule holds little of novelty or excitement. Old Jacob Gibbs, whose period of honorable service had extended uneventfully through the spy scares of '98 and '17, plodded his methodical rounds, floor by floor, with now and then a perfunctory glance outside, as he passed a convenient window. He had no reason to believe that this night would differ from the many which had come and gone in quiet, featureless monotony.

It was past eleven o'clock and commencing to drizzle, when old Jacob, looking out of one of the north windows on the second floor, fancied he saw a formless blur off to the right, darkening the strip of grass within the spiked iron fence which surrounded the building.

He was about to pass on when his

glance was arrested by what seemed to be a slight, stealthy movement. He was not at all sure; his new glasses were tricky things, and he had not, as he expressed it, "got the hang of them yet." Besides, why should any one be lurking around this old building, which surely contained nothing of any value?

But old Jacob, painstaking and conscientious, decided nevertheless to investigate. Polishing his glasses he shuffled down the long room to another window, nearer the mysterious black blur on the strip of grass and farther from the glass door through which the bright corridor light might reveal him to any one outside.

He pressed his round red face to the pane and stood there, peering out. As his eyes grew more accustomed to the darkness, he began to make out a huddled shape, moving with apparent aimlessness up and down, to and fro, along a narrow rectangle beneath one of the windows.

With as little noise as possible the watchman raised the sash slightly. The moist drizzle sifted down upon his bald pate, as he stuck his head through the narrow opening and, leaning across the sill, stared downward in amazement.

A tiny circle of illumination, its source invisible, wavered erratically over the wet grass, gradually approaching the walls of the building. The mysterious visitor, grown more confident, was now making use of a pocket flash light.

During his long period of service Jacob Gibbs, though he had never captured a trespasser, had often thought out what he would do in such an emergency as the present. Slowly his right hand went back to the old-fashioned pistol in his hip pocket.

The trespasser was becoming more careless. The area of light broadened, and the edge of a long coat flopped in silhouette across it. A white hand crept forward ghostlike into the light, fran-

tically combing the wet grass. The warm spring rain pattered down upon the new green leaves in the darkness with increasing force.

Old Jacob Gibbs, revolver at last in readiness, heaved up his broad shoulders. The sash yielded with a rasping, hideous squeak.

At the sound the glowworm glimmer vanished, leaving a blurring spot of darkness upon his retina. Through it he had a fleeting glimpse of an indistinct form darting desperately for the fence.

"Hi, there—stop!"

To the chagrin of old Jacob the stentorian challenge was utterly disregarded. Blinking, he leveled his gun through the darkness.

"Stop, I say—stop, or I'll shoot!"

The muffled figure, disdaining the gate, topped the spiked fence, as if on wings. As it rose, the revolver blazed. Through the smoke and glare the watchman saw his target, faltering in mid-air, fall flutteringly on the far side.

There was a tense second.

Before he could pull in his head and descend to investigate, he heard the clatter of heavy, running feet, and a bulky, brass-buttoned figure rounded the corner of the building.

"What's this shooting? That you up there, Jake? What's wrong?"

Patrolman Jones, breathing hard, drew up beneath the window.

"There's been some one snooping around, down where you are," explained the watchman. "They wouldn't halt—"

"I heard your old cannon. I was just down the street. Did you wing 'em?"

"I don't know. There was only one. Look by the fence, ahead of you there."

Patrolman Jones reconnoitered.

"Nothing doing," he reported.

"No?" exclaimed old Jacob Gibbs in some surprise.

"No; maybe he was hit and crawled off somewhere. What did he look like?"

"I don't know—it was too dark to see. You're sure he isn't there?"

"Come on down and show me. Maybe we can find him yet. Which way did he go?"

But their combined efforts, embracing an area of several blocks in all directions, yielded no clew. And before it occurred to either of them to look for footprints, the beating rain drove them to cover and obliterated all traces of the unknown marauder. To the end of his days the midnight attack on the Department of Welfare remained to old Jacob Gibbs an unsolved mystery.

Less mystery would have attached to the occurrence had either of them looked more closely at the slight feminine figure waiting beside the car stop on the corner. A green silk umbrella, held low, partly protected her from the increasing downpour and shielded from casual observation the wet, dirt-grimed hands, the torn skirt where an iron spike had caught, and the small round hole in the wide, flapping collar of her new spring coat.

The conductor cast a curious glance at her dripping apparel, as she boarded the car. Two men on the seat opposite stared openly, with audible and humiliating speculation on her appearance. When at last, after another stopping journey across a vacant lot, she had attained the privacy of her room, tears of humiliation and failure were running down her wet, splotchy cheeks.

For she had failed. It did not seem possible that she had been unable to find any trace of the ring. She was sure she had twice covered the ground thoroughly—first in the darkness, then with the flash light. But she had not found it.

It was nearly one o'clock when she hung her dripping clothing over the lukewarm radiator and crawled wearily into bed. It was three minutes past nine when, after a late, unrestful sleep and a hurried, futile gallop from her

room to a restaurant and to the trolley, she sullenly signed the pink tardy slip at the door.

Her spirits were at a low ebb, as she slumped down at her desk and drew her work toward her. Whatever delightful glamour rested upon successful larceny, she had learned that no such roseate hue enhanced abortive theft. With her labor for her pains, she felt even more a criminal than if she had succeeded. To the original theft she had now added violation of government property and misuse of government time—and yet the diamond ring was no nearer her avaricious hands.

She rose listlessly and crossed to the window to consult the postal guide. An idle glance outside electrified her. The ring had not fallen after all!

Somehow the window, slammed down at just the right moment, had caught and imprisoned the last half inch of cord before it could slip out beneath it. On the edge of the outer sill, where in last night's flurry and panic she had overlooked it, its slender length still curved downward out of sight along the brick wall.

The morning following the storm was unseasonably cold, and the steam was sizzling in the radiators. No one had yet opened the windows. But when they did—

For a hectic half hour Vera Simmons, neglecting her work, sought vainly to evolve some means of getting the ring. If she opened the window, it would fall to the ground outside before she could seize it. Then, too, some one else might see it fall—might pick it up before she could get out of the building. No, that wouldn't do.

Suppose—

"Too much heat on, Miss Simmons? I'll open your window here for you."

She looked up with a startled shiver. "No!" she said hastily. "Don't bother, Mr. Robinson. I'm—I'm chilly this morning."

Claude Robinson passed on with a perplexed frown, mopping surreptitiously at his brow, as he squatted in the corner to search in the lower drawer of the correspondence file.

"Hot as Halifax in here," he muttered. "These damned cold-blooded women give me a pain."

But Vera Simmons was not thinking of the temperature. Suppose she broke one of the lower panes—accidentally of course—and reached through to pull up the cord? She pondered this, only to discard it. The crash would attract attention; some one would be sure to rush to her assistance.

Then could she not open the next window and reach across on the outside? She measured the distance with her eye. Her arm was not long enough; of this she felt sure. But in the corner behind her, leaning against the wall, stood a long steel rod from a filing cabinet. If she could hook the cord with the button-shaped brass head of the rod—

Reaching backward stealthily she possessed herself of the rod. Her feet were already gathered under her to rise, when the outer door flew open. Mr. Baldwin, returning from a visit to the chief's office, sniffed the stuffy atmosphere disapprovingly.

"Too close in here," he growled. "Mr. Robinson! Oh, Mr. Robinson!"

"Yes, sir?"

"Open a window or two back there will you, please?"

"Yes, indeed, sir!"

Claude Robinson, rising with alacrity, reached the window in two strides. Before Vera Simmons could formulate a protest, he had released the catch and thrown up the sash.

A fresh, gusty breeze frolicked in at the window, blowing chill on the white-faced girl who stood, her hand at her throat, staring at the outer edge of the sill, over which the end of the cord had flicked and vanished.

III.

It was ten minutes before she dared to approach the window and look out. From the green sward, thirty feet below, a dazzling sparkle smote her eyes. One facet of the stone, turned by chance toward the sun, focused its rays upon her face like a tiny crystal mirror.

The recovery of the ring had now become a veritable obsession. It did not occur to her to abandon her efforts; already she had gone through too much for that. At no moment had the gem been other than barely, tantalizingly beyond her reach. Surely now, when in plain view it glistened in the grass just under the window, it could not elude her much longer.

But she was not yet out of the building.

Mr. Baldwin was a strict disciplinarian; two weeks ago he had issued an order forbidding clerks in his section to be excused on passes during working hours, except in emergencies. The clerks, resenting this unwarranted infringement on their rights, had solved this problem in less than twenty-four hours.

Vera Simmons threw a paper clip at Isabelle and beckoned her across, dropping a nickle in her palm.

"Go out and call 'Baldy' for me, will you? Tell him I got to get off right away."

The other girl winked.

"What is it—grandmother dead?"

"No—make it sister sick, if he asks. But see if he won't call me to the phone."

"All right."

Isabelle slipped out to the pay booth in the washroom. Vera Simmons glanced after her maliciously. To her distorted mental vision it seemed that she was doing a clever thing, thus to employ Isabelle's unwitting aid in getting away with the girl's own diamond. It was certainly a good joke on Isabelle.

She crossed to the window. Yes, the ring was still there. As she looked, one of the torn newspaper pages within the iron fence, blowing half across it, caught on some unseen projection and lay fluttering and trembling under the ripples of wind sweeping across the park. A hasty plan began to form in her mind.

The phone rang, as she returned to her desk. She started up in assumed surprise, as Mr. Baldwin, after listening for a moment, gruffly summoned her to the desk. He had not yet fathomed the subterfuge by which his clerks obtained passes.

"Hello," she said sweetly "Yes, this is Miss Simmons. You say she wants me to come home? Well, I'll try to get off right away. Thanks for calling me. Good-by."

She hung up and turned to her chief.

"May I have a pass, Mr. Baldwin?" she asked. "They just phoned me my sister had been taken sick."

"Oh, all right," assented Mr. Baldwin ungraciously, reaching for a blank. "You'll be off for the rest of the day?"

"Yes, all day. Thank you so much, Mr. Baldwin."

Isabelle had not yet returned. Pass in hand, Vera Simmons went swiftly out into the hall. Too impatient to wait for the sluggish elevator, she ran rapidly down the two flights of stairs, handing her slip to the guard at the door as she hurried out past him.

Approaching the corner of the building she walked more slowly, perfecting her plan. She would saunter casually past; affect to notice and be attracted by the torn sheet of newspaper; step through the little gate; pick up, with one motion, newspaper and ring; turn, walk out, and away. Any one watching her might think her penurious, thus to appropriate a discarded paper; they could suspect nothing worse.

She turned the corner and halted, horror-stricken. A ragged-looking park cleaner, in shabby coat and patched

trousers, now stood within the fence. His canvas bag rested on the ground beside him. In his right hand was a steel prod, upon which he was in the act of impaling the torn newspaper on which she had relied for camouflage.

As she stared, her heart fluttering painfully, he bent again to scrutinize the ground. Then, picking up the cord, he reeled it upon elbow and hand, his eyes popping out like a snail's at sight of the platinum circle looped upon the other end.

Vera Simmons put out an unsteady hand to the corner post of the iron fence. Half sick with fear and anger, she impotently watched the man, his eyes gleaming, detach the ring and stow it away in the side pocket of his ragged coat.

A sudden, violent giddiness seized her, and she reeled, while waves of nausea swept her. Holding tightly to the post, she closed her eyes, regretting bitterly her scant, hastily botched breakfast, which now threatened to bring back her old enemy, acute indigestion.

Moments passed before, with a final tug at her upset nerves, the spasm subsided. But in the brief space that her eyes had been closed, the park cleaner had disappeared.

Her frantic glance, darting in all directions, at length lighted on his departing form a hundred feet away in the opposite direction, making erratic progress across the paper-dotted ellipse. Running weakly, she set out after him.

At her breathless hail he turned, staring curiously at the panting, red-faced girl who came up to him, shaking her stringy yellow hair out of her hostile green eyes.

"Well, whatcher want?" he demanded.

"My—any ring!" panted Vera Simmons.

"What ring, lady?"

"The ring you picked up—back by the Welfare Department!"

"Oh, that ring—was that yours, lady?"

I gotta turn that in at headquarters—that's orders. You'll have to identify it there."

Vera Simmons, scrutinizing his stupid, coarse-lined face, could not tell whether he was telling the truth or not. Perhaps he intended to keep it himself. At all events she would never dare to put in a claim.

"Won't you please give it to me now?" she pleaded desperately.

"No, lady, I can't," said the other.

"It's mine. I can identify it. Just look inside the band. It has—it has—'C. R. to I. M.'"

The park cleaner hesitated, his hand moving uncertainly toward his pocket. Vera Simmons in her anxiety committed a fatal error.

"I'll give you five dollars if you will," she offered.

Instant suspicion leaped to the man's eyes. His hand dropped to his side.

"How come you're so anxious to throw away five dollars?" he demanded. "It won't cost you a cent up there—if it's yours."

"I can't—I haven't time——"

The man shook his head, cutting short her faltering pleas.

"Aw, gwan! What you tryin' to do—put somethin' over on me? Say, lemme tell you somethin', lady: I'm wise to all them fake-jewelry and pocketbook games—and to all you spotters, too—see?"

He leered knowingly. Vera Simmons, trembling with impotent rage, could have murdered the doltish creature for his smirking stupidity.

"But listen——" she began desperately.

"Aw, gwan! I ain't got time to listen. Call around for your ring up at headquarters, if you're straight. If you ain't, maybe you can sting the boss with it—if you got the nerve."

Insolently he turned away, stooping to impale a greasy paper bag under a flowering shrub. She stood still, look-

ing after him with a sinking heart. Whether he turned it in or not, the ring was now to her irretrievably lost.

She looked again. Then, every nerve in her body tingling, she forced herself to stand perfectly still, mastering a mad impulse to dash forward with a shout.

The park cleaner, his back still insolently averted, rambled out of sight behind the tall hedge, not realizing that the diamond ring, slipping through a hole in his ragged pocket, now lay sparkling on the close-packed earth beneath the flowering shrub.

IV.

Almost dizzy with the shock of sudden elation, Vera Simmons made for the bus stop on the far side of the ellipse, walking as if on air. The fragrant spring perfume of the trees was sweet about her; the soft brown earth crumbled beneath her hurrying, heedless feet. In her pocket lay the ring for which she had stolen and betrayed—secure now beyond any chance of loss or fear of pursuit. That in her mad chase she had broken laws, moral and criminal, legal and spiritual, seemed not to matter now.

Absorbed in her tumultuous thoughts, she scarcely noticed the blue-uniformed six-footer who just then appeared, wiping his nose and coughing, from behind a tree in the distance. His sudden hail brought her air castles crashing to earth.

"Hey, you!"

She looked around, startled; then started on. Of course he did not mean her.

"Hey, there, I said!"

She looked again. Conviction, terrible and absolute, descended upon her. There was no one else within a hundred feet.

"Yes, you, I mean! Stop right where you are!"

Park Policeman Caskins advanced upon her. He was within twenty feet

when Vera Simmons, shattering the horrible hypnosis which held her like a nightmare, broke and ran—ran blindly, desperately, panic-spurred; ran until her breath failed, as a heavy hand fell roughly on her shoulder.

"Here, you little fool!" coughed the officer. "Thought you were going to get away with it, did you? Just you come along with me."

Fast in the grip of the law, her nerve broke and vanished utterly. Panting, sobbing, she allowed herself to be marched ignominiously back across the park, too stunned by the suddenness of her apprehension to resent her captor's harshness, too dazed even to shrink from the curious stares which bordered their route to the station house.

Police Sergeant Tempest glanced up sharply at the entry of Park Policeman Caskins, escorting a hysterical, disheveled prisoner with reddened eyes and lifeless yellow bobbed hair.

"What charge?" he questioned formally, pen poised in readiness.

Another fit of coughing seized Caskins. Vera Simmons spoke in his stead, her thoughts harboring some misty notion of State's evidence and immunity. At any rate they had the goods on her; of what avail to maintain her innocence?

"Will it—will it make it any easier if I confess, officer?" she asked.

Sergeant Tempest opened his mouth. Then he closed it with a snap and shot a mandatory glance at the other.

"Tell the whole truth," he ordered.

Vera Simmons drew her hand from her pocket. The ring, its white-faceted stone a glory of fire and dreams, lay sparkling on the high desk.

"I stole it," she said dully. "It belongs to a girl at the office. I almost lost it a dozen times since. Damn the thing! I wish I'd never seen it!"

Park Policeman Caskins, clearing his throat, leaned over to inspect the diamond.

"I'll just change the charge against her, sergeant," he said, looking up. "Make it larceny—grand larceny, too. That's a whale of a big stone."

"Change the charge?" exclaimed Vera Simmons, her eyes widening in amazement. "Why—what else could it be? Wasn't that what you brought me here for?"

Into the hard blue eyes of Park Policeman Caskins came a faint gleam of pity, instantly quenched.

"Why, no, miss," he said. "How should I know you had the ring? Didn't you see the signs around that newly seeded section on the ellipse that you were crossing? That was what I pulled you in for."

She stared at him blankly unable yet to realize the ironic insignificance of the last broken law which had brought her tardily to justice.

"The signs?" she faltered. "What signs?"

"'Keep Off the Grass'," replied Park Policeman Caskins.

IGNORES HOLDUP SUMMONS

JULIAN DENNER, of the Bronx, New York, was recently ordered by two holdup men to enter a hallway. His refusal may cost him his life. He is now in a critical condition at the Harlem Hospital.

Denner was walking along One Hundred and Twenty-fourth Street near Park Avenue when the two holdup men tried to intercept him. Paying no attention to their commands, he hurried on his way, for it was in the small hours of the morning. He had gone but a few yards when he heard the crack of a pistol and then felt a sharp pain. He managed to walk to the next corner, where he fell. Here he was found by a passer-by who summoned assistance, and he was removed to the hospital.

The Safety Pin

by J. S. Fletcher

Author of "Kiffin, Man of Mystery," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

A MR. JAMES DEANE, of Camborne, in Cornwall, comes to stay at the Chancellor Hotel in Southernstowe. He leaves the hotel mysteriously about midnight on the day of his arrival, and his dead body is discovered two days later in a disguised sand pit on the northern edge of the town.

No direct clue to the murder is found by the police, but John Hackdale, an assistant manager in Mrs. Champernowne's store, recognizes a safety pin on the pocket of the dead man. He uses his find as a means to promote his own advancement in Mrs. Champernowne's establishment. Besides being the mayor of Southernstowe, Mrs. Champernowne is a rich and influential woman who is engaged to Sir Reville Childerstone. She had spoken to Deane on the night of the murder, but, for reasons of her own, she is anxious to keep the fact secret. Bartlett, a loner of the town, has also seen Deane in the park of Ashenhurst House, Mrs. Champernowne's home. He uses his knowledge to blackmail Mrs. Champernowne, and she uses Hackdale as a go-between.

Miss Cynthia Pretty, Deane's ward, remains in Southernstowe to find and punish the murderer of her guardian. Francis Shelmore is her lawyer. In his office is employed young Simmons Hackdale, John Hackdale's brother. Simmons is out to improve his prospects, and on a business visit to the north of England discovers that James Deane was formerly known as Arradeane, and that his wife was then the present Mrs. Champernowne. He makes love to a maid in Mrs. Champernowne's service and discovers that his brother and Jim Bartlett are receiving money. He also makes love to Miss Pretty. He is determined in any case to advance his own interests, either through blackmail or marriage.

While walking with Jennie, the maid, at Ashenhurst House, he stumbles upon his brother's revolver in the sand pit, where the body of Deane was discovered.

CHAPTER XVIII.

GREEN EYES.

BUT when Simmons had hidden the revolver in a place where there was no chance of any one finding it, save by a search, such as was not likely to be made, he proceeded to another stage in the path to uncertainty. He had no doubt whatever that the revolver was his brother's. Simmons knew all about it; how and why John had got it, and where John kept it. There was no secret about that; the revolver's usual resting place was in a certain drawer in John's bedroom, a drawer in which lay a miscellaneous collection of odds and ends, and it was always unlocked.

Now he repaired to that drawer to make sure. There was no revolver there; he had never thought there would be. He had the revolver—that revolver,

the revolver with the initials "J. H." scratched on the metal. So that was that!

When the whole thing was summarized it came to this: He, Simmons, had found a revolver in Mrs. Champernowne's orchard, close to the place where James Deane's body had been found, shot through the head, and the revolver was undoubtedly the property of his brother, John Hackdale. That was certain, as certain as that he was Simmons, or that that was cold beef, there on the summer table.

All right! But what next? His ideas were still a little confused, but he had no doubt about one thing. He was going to turn this and everything else connected with it to his own advantage. All his life he had been sedulously sucking into his mental system the lesson which his elder brother had taught him from childhood—look to yourself! Self

first! Forget the rest! That was Simmons' creed, and he was a veritable bigot in his belief in it. He was not greatly concerned as to whether his brother actually shot Deane, or whether Mrs. Champernowne did, or whether Mr. Alfred did; but he was sure that one or other of 'em did, and that he had the means of proving their guilt. Probably all three were guilty as principals or accessories.

Never mind that. It was an insignificant detail. For all he cared they could have shot Deane every day in the week, if they liked. His care was for what he could make out of his knowledge. Mrs. Champernowne must pay, for she was the person with the purse. Oh, yes, at last he had got her and John and all the lot in a string, and he would pull the string—tightening and tightening it until they crawled to his feet, if need be. There was only one person to be considered—himself. He would cheerfully throw Mrs. Champernowne and her brother to the police, if need be—and John, too. For it was self first all the time. But Simmons knew there would be no throwing anybody to the police, for Mrs. C. would pay. And all that was necessary now was to walk warily, make sure of one or two little points, and then choose the exact, the psychological moment for a swift, determined, ruthless stroke.

His brother came in. Simmons behaved as if nothing had happened. He ate his supper, chatted, sat up a while smoking cigarettes, while John smoked his pipe. Eventually Simmons went to bed, congratulating himself on his luck. What with his undoubted success with Miss Pretty and his discovery in the orchard, he had a good day, a splendid day. He slept soundly.

But, if Simmons had only known what was going on in a certain bedroom in the domestic quarter at Ashenhurst House, he would have had nightmare and cold sweats and shivers that would

have shaken him from top to toe and left him reduced to the condition of a jellyfish stranded on a rapidly drying beach. All unknown to Simmons, his candle was being undermined, his web torn to fragments, the ground cut away from beneath his feet.

Kitty Trevice, after her afternoon out, returned to Mrs. Champernowne's home at ten o'clock in the evening and found Jane Pratt and the other servants at supper; later she and Jane retired to the apartment which they shared together. Kitty and Jane—Jennie to her familiars—because of long association, were close friends, with no secrets about their love affairs. Kitty was well aware that Simmons was Jane's latest flame, and one to whom she was not disinclined to stick; she knew, in fact, that Jane was quite willing to become Mrs. Simmons Hackdale. And, in the process of disrobing for the night, she suddenly turned on her friend, with a look that implied more things than one.

"Jennie," she whispered, "I've got something to tell you! Now you take it in the right way, my dear, and be thankful you've been warned in time!"

"Warned!" exclaimed Jane Pratt, turning a suddenly suspicious face on Kitty. "What about? Who against? What've you been hearing?"

"Hearing, nothing—seeing a lot!" said Kitty. "Look here: Don't you have anything more to do with that Simmons Hackdale! He's only using you. He's not serious."

Jane Pratt dropped the garment which she was about to array herself in and turned on her friend.

"What—whatever do you mean, Kitty Trevice?" she said. "Somebody's been——"

"Nobody's been doing anything in the way of telling me anything," affirmed Kitty. "I'm talking about what I know myself, so there! Simmons Hackdale is treating you shameful—he's deceiving you. He's walking you out and making

love and all that sort o' thing—yes, and all the time he's carrying on with that young lady at the Chancellor—if she is a lady! Which," concluded Kitty, with a toss of her head, "there might be two opinions about."

"What do you mean?" repeated Miss Pratt faintly.

"I'll tell you," said Kitty. "When I was going home this afternoon I went through Danesley Old Wood. You know how lonely it is there. Well, though they never saw me, I saw this Miss Pretty and your Sim there—in a nice, quiet corner, oh, yes!"

"You didn't!" exclaimed Miss Pratt. "He told me he was at home this afternoon!"

"Then he told you a great, big story!" declared Kitty. "Lord bless you! I was close to 'em. They'd have been mad enough, I'll bet, if they'd known how close I was to them."

"What—what were they doing?" asked Jane Pratt in still fainter accents.

"Doing? I can tell you I saw plenty! If that's how young ladies behave with young men, well, all I can say is that I'm thankful I know how to behave myself better! Anyway, I'm telling you the truth, Jennie, and, if I were you, next time Sim Hackdale comes whistling round our orchard, I should either let him whistle, or send him off with a flea in his ear—a good-for-nothing young scamp!"

Miss Pratt made no reply. She got into bed. Within five minutes she heard Kitty Trevice breathing the faint and regular suspirations of healthy sleep. But Miss Pratt did not sleep. She knew Kitty, and Kitty was a truthful girl. Therefore Sim was a wicked liar. Yet she had taken a great fancy to Sim. He had made love to her, as she had never been made love to before; boy though he was, she knew him to be an adept at love-making. She had liked him to kiss her at their secret meetings in the orchard and the adjacent lanes, and now

she was told on positive evidence that he was expending his kisses and embraces on another girl. She had seen the other girl—and her fine clothes and pretty face and all the rest of it. Jealousy, fierce, unreasoning, clamorous, sprang up in Miss Pratt's bosom. The longer she lay awake the fiercer it grew. It was with her when at last she slept; it was there when she awoke, tired and heavy-eyed in the morning; it gnawed at her all day. And now and then Kitty Trevice helped to feed its fires.

After Mrs. Champernowne and Mr. Alfred had dined that Monday evening, Jane Pratt asked and received permission to go out. She made a very careful toilet, and under cover of the dark departed toward the town. She walked straight to the back entrance of the Chancellor Hotel and, going to the kitchen door, asked for Gracie White. Gracie White was another of her friends, and Gracie for some time had been second chambermaid at the Chancellor. Recently she had succeeded the erring Mary Sanders as first chambermaid. Jane Pratt thought it more than possible that Gracie could tell her something she wanted to know. And, when Gracie appeared, Jane drew her away into a quiet corner of the courtyard.

"Gracie," she said, "you know that young lady that's stopping here—the one who's something to do with the gentleman that was murdered?"

"Of course!" answered Gracie. "Miss Pretty. She's on my floor—got a private sitting room and a bedroom there."

"I want to know something—between you and me," murmured Miss Pratt. "You know Simmons Hackdale? Does he ever come here to see her?"

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed Gracie. "He's been here several times of an evening. He's with her now."

"Now?" said Miss Pratt. "Now?"

"Yes," answered Gracie. "She went out just after dinner and was out for an hour or so. He came back with her."

They're in her sitting room. They've been there for some time!"

"By themselves?" suggested Miss Pratt.

"Of course," assented Gracie. "It's a private room. What do you want to know for, Jennie?"

But Miss Pratt shook her head. "Never mind now," she answered. "I'll tell you some other time."

Then she bade her friend good-by and went away. She walked very slowly along the street outside, her head downcast, her eyes fixed on the pavement, as if she were thinking. She *was* thinking; and, as a result of her cogitations, she suddenly looked up, quickened her pace, and made straight for Shelmore's private house on the outskirts. Here she rang the front doorbell and asked if Miss Pratt could see Mr. Shelmore at once on private and highly important business.

Shelmore, who at that moment was playing chess with his maiden aunt, Miss Chauncey, looked up in wonder at the maid who delivered Jane's message.

"Miss Pratt!" he exclaimed. "Who on earth is Miss Pratt?"

"Mrs. Champernowne's parlor maid, sir," answered the girl.

Shelmore glanced at his aunt, at the chessboard, at the clock on the mantelpiece, and finally at the maid.

"Take her into the study," he said.

He went off to the study presently only to find Jane Pratt very rigid and pale on the edge of a straight-backed chair. She rose at his entrance and made him a polite bow. Shelmore saw at once that here was a young woman who was obviously agitated, but who was also resolute and determined about something. He motioned her to an easy-chair by his desk.

"Sit down," he said kindly. "You want to see me professionally?"

Jane Pratt took the chair he pointed out and nodded her head, on which was her best smart hat.

"Yes, Mr. Shelmore, I do," she answered tremulously, but with a gleam in her eyes which showed her hearer that whatever it was she had come to tell she was going to tell it. "I do, indeed! I know something, and I will not keep it back any longer. You're a lawyer, and you'll know what to do, Mr. Shelmore. Do you know that your clerk, Simmons Hackdale, is playing a rare game?"

"What game?" asked Shelmore.

"A bad, wicked, deceitful game!" declared Jane Pratt with emphasis. "And he's tried to drag me into it. He's a tongue that would get round anybody, I think; but I've found him out, and I won't have anything more to do with him or it—I won't!"

Shelmore glanced at the door. It was tightly shut, and he drew his own chair a little nearer to his visitor's.

"Tell me all about it," he said invitingly. "Take your time."

Jane Pratt took her time. Before she had been talking many minutes, Shelmore picked up pencil and paper and began to make notes. And when his visitor had come to the end of her statement, he found himself confronting certain points which were not only interesting, but serious. He glanced over them again in silence.

1. On the night of the murder of James Deane, Jane Pratt saw Mrs. Champernowne in company with a strange man in the grounds of Ashen-hurst House.

2. Jane Pratt told Simmons Hackdale of this in strict confidence.

3. From various things said and done since then, Jane Pratt formed the opinion that Simmons Hackdale was endeavoring to trace the murderer of James Deane—and knew more than he had told her.

4. On a recent evening John Hackdale and James Bartlett called on Mrs. Champernowne. John Hackdale saw her alone; then fetched in Bartlett. Jane

Pratt watched through drawing-room window and saw Mrs. Champernowne write a check and hand it to John Hackdale in James Bartlett's presence.

5. Jane Pratt told Simmons Hackdale of this, and at his suggestion she appropriated the sheet of blotting paper on which Mrs. Champernowne had dried the check. Simmons, by means of a hand mirror, showed her that the check was made out for one thousand pounds.

6. On the previous evening, while she and Simmons were in the orchard of Mrs. Champernowne's house, Simmons picked up a revolver which had been lying in the long grass. He carried it away with him.

Shelmore read his notes twice. Then he gave Jane Pratt a steady, searching look.

"I gather from what you say that you and Simmons have been sweethearts, eh?" he asked.

"He forced his attentions on me!" answered Jane Pratt. "I didn't go after him."

"But you've evidently been keeping company," said Shelmore. "Pretty closely, I think! Now what's happened to make you come and tell me all this?"

Jane Pratt hesitated, studying the pattern of the carpet.

"You can say anything you like to a solicitor, you know," suggested Shelmore. "Come, now—you've had some reason for—is it jealousy? There's some other girl?"

Jane Pratt's anger flared up.

"Girl?" she exclaimed. "It's that fine young madam at the Chancellor! He's carrying on with her. He was with her—kissing her—and all that—in Danesley Old Wood yesterday afternoon, and—then he'd been promising to marry me as soon as ever he got this reward."

Shelmore preserved an unmoved countenance, even at the mention of Miss Pretty.

"I see," he said. "Evidently playing a double game. Very wicked of him!

But now is there any other reason for your coming to me?"

"Well!" answered Jane Pratt after a pause, during which her temper appeared to cool down a little. "There is that revolver business. That frightened me—seemed to——"

"To bring the murder rather too close, eh?" suggested Shelmore.

"Yes," assented his visitor. "When it comes to revolvers, I don't want to have anything more to do with it. Nor with Sim Hackdale. He's bad—he can't open his lips without lying. And I've told you all about it, Mr. Shelmore."

"Very well," said Shelmore. "Now then, listen to me. Don't mention one word of all this until you see me again. I'll attend to it. Keep it as close as——"

"There's nobody can be closer than I can if I like, Mr. Shelmore," interrupted Jane Pratt.

"Then be close," repeated Shelmore. "Keep absolute silence and wait!"

He saw her out of his front door and watched her go away. And, though he went back to the chessboard, Miss Chauncey soon perceived that his thoughts were not with it or her.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MAN WHO GOT OUT.

WHILE Simmons Hackdale slept soundly, and Jane Pratt cried herself to sleep, as a result of her fit of mingled jealousy, anger and revenge, Shelmore lay awake, sorely perplexed by what he had heard from the parlor maid. He was not altogether surprised at her news about Simmons. For some time he had realized that his clerk was a crafty and astute young person, of great natural ability, who would probably sooner or later arrive at a turning point in life and be obliged to decide whether he would abide by a straight road, or deviate into a crooked one. Nor was he surprised by what he had heard of Miss Cynthia Pretty. He and

his aunt had shown considerable hospitality to that young lady and had consequently seen a great deal of her, and Shelmore had come to the conclusion that she was not only resolved on having her own way about anything and everything, but was also a flirt who might easily develop into a female rake.

In a strictly professional way he had advised Miss Pretty to go home to Cambridge and leave matters to him. Miss Pretty had made a mouth and intimated that she was quite well where she was for a time, and she had let him see plainly that she loved liberty and knew that nobody could prevent her from exercising it. No, there was nothing in all that to surprise him; he was conscious of the fact that Miss Pretty had tried to flirt with him, and that he had remained severely cold. No wonder then that she had turned to his clerk, who, as he well knew, would be as plausible as he was crafty and as ingratiating as he was sly. He was not sure that Sim Hackdale and Cynthia Pretty would not make a well-matched, materialistic young couple.

No, those were not the perplexing things. What did perplex him was the question—what was it all leading to? Deane asking information of Belling as to who and what Mrs. Champernowne was; Mrs. Champernowne being seen in her own grounds on the night of the murder, with a stranger who was almost certainly Deane; Deane's dead and murdered body being found just behind Mrs. Champernowne's grounds; Mrs. Champernowne giving a check to John Hackdale in James Bartlett's presence; the finding of the revolver in Mrs. Champernowne's orchard. What did all these things mean, and what did they suggest? Shelmore fell asleep over these questions; they were with him when he awoke next morning.

"Mellapont!" he muttered, as he rose. "Mellapont! I must see him at once."
He went to the police station on his

way to the office, judging it best to see the superintendent before he saw Simmons. Closeted with Mellapont and armed with the notes he had taken, he disclosed everything that Jane Pratt had told him the night before. Mellapont's obvious amazement increased as the story went on.

"Do you think that's all true?" he asked, as Shelmore made an end. "That the girl wasn't—well, exaggerating, if not inventing? She admitted that she came to you out of jealousy. Now a jealous woman——"

"I've no hesitation in saying that I consider her an absolutely credible witness," said Shelmore. "I don't think she was either inventing or exaggerating. I think that the finding of the revolver last night made her reflect more seriously. In addition to her jealousy about my clerk, she got the feeling that things were getting—well, a bit too hot."

"You've thought a good deal about it since last night, no doubt?" suggested Mellapont. "Weighed it up, of course?"

"I've thought about nothing else," replied Shelmore grimly.

"Well, what do you make of it?" asked Mellapont.

Shelmore shook his head. But the gesture denoted not so much perplexity as a certain regret that the necessity for coming to a conclusion should have arisen.

"I don't think there can be any doubt that, in some way or another, Mrs. Champernowne has been and is mixed up in the affair," he answered. "If you remember, Mellapont, when you and I first made inquiries at the Chancellor, Belling told us that when Deane returned from the picture house that night—the night of his arrival here—and, as far as we know, of his murder——"

"From the medical evidence it was the night of his murder," interrupted Mellapont. "The medical men agreed that he'd been dead forty-eight hours or thereabouts, when John Hackdale

found the body that Wednesday evening."

"Very well; on the night of his murder then," continued Shelmore. "You remember, anyway, that Belling told us that on his return from the picture house Deane asked him questions about Mrs. Champernowne. How do we know that he hadn't recognized Mrs. Champernowne as somebody he knew?"

"But he asked Belling who she was," said Mellapont. "He didn't know who she was until Belling told him. I remember that distinctly."

"That may have been a blind," remarked Shelmore. "He may have known well enough who she was and yet have wanted for reasons of his own not to let it be known that he knew. What he probably wanted was information about her status in Southernstowe. What more likely than that he should preface his questioning of Belling by asking who the lady was who seemed to be a person of some consequence? I think Deane knew Mrs. Champernowne. And I think it was Deane who was with Mrs. Champernowne in her grounds that night."

"If we only knew that for certain," said Mellapont.

"It seems to me to fit in," said Shelmore. "Anyway, we do know that Deane, evidently acting on some sudden impulse, left the Chancellor and went out. It must have been Deane that this girl saw. But after that— There are always missing links. Can they be supplied in this case?"

"That episode can—and will have to be—gone into," remarked Mellapont. "For instance, if it comes to further questioning the girl, I should ask her more about her mistress' movements that night, after she'd been seen with this man in the grounds. Did she go into the house soon after Jane Pratt saw her with him, or did she stay out any time longer? Important, that! But what I'm most curious about, Shelmore, is the

check incident. Hackdale and Bartlett have an interview with Mrs. Champernowne. She's seen to write out a check and hand it to Hackdale. Now if Hackdale had been alone, I shouldn't have thought much of it. But Bartlett was with him. Presumably the check was for the two of them. Why? Bartlett is a sly fellow—unprincipled! And this puts me in mind of something. Until very recently Bartlett was in very low water—very low water, indeed. He was hanging about the city. Why, as a matter of fact, he was glad to run errands, or hold a horse! He was thankful for a shilling. He disappeared suddenly, and then all of a sudden he turns up with information about that watch, and he's well dressed—good clothes, linen, boots, hat. Where did he get his money? Strikes me, Shelmore, Bartlett probably knows a lot."

"Do you know where he is now?" asked Shelmore.

"I do, fortunately," answered Mellapont. "He's living in Portsmouth, and I have his address. I told him he'd have to be in attendance when Kight and Sanders are brought up again, and he told me where he was staying. I shall look up Bartlett, for he knows something. But now this clerk of yours, young Sim—what's he after?"

"The reward which Miss Pretty so foolishly offered," replied Shelmore. "He's greedy about money! That's his notion—the reward!"

"But are you sure? Looks to me as if the young ferret was quietly gathering all the information he could, but for another purpose."

"What?" asked Shelmore.

Mellapont gave his caller a knowing look.

"Mrs. Champernowne's a very wealthy woman, Shelmore," he said. "She's wealthier than Miss Pretty, I guess. There's such a thing as blackmail!"

Shelmore started.

"May be," he said. "He's unprincipled."

"You haven't said anything to him since seeing Jane Pratt?" asked Mellapont. "You haven't? That's good. Look here, let's meet craft with craft. Do you think you could get Master Simmons clean out of the town at once, within an hour or two, for a couple of days?"

"Why?" asked Shelmore in surprise.

"So as to prevent him from communicating with anybody—Jane Pratt and Miss Pretty in particular—while I get to work," answered Mellapont. "Admirable, I assure you!"

"I could," said Shelmore after a moment's reflection. "Yes, I can send him away at once to London on business that'll keep him there a day or two—three, if you like."

"Two will do," said Mellapont. "Get him off at once and keep him away until day after to-morrow. In the meantime"—he gave his caller a significant glance—"in the meantime I'll make some inquiries that'll help me to be better fitted to encounter him than we are now! You'll be careful, of course, not to let him know that you've heard anything." He waited for an answer.

"Oh, of course!" said Shelmore. "I've an excellent excuse for sending him away—excellent! He'll think it's all in the way of business."

He rose to go, and Mellapont rose, too. But before they reached the door the superintendent suddenly pointed to the chair which Shelmore had left.

"Just sit down again for five minutes, Shelmore," he said. "I've an idea. I won't keep you longer—less, perhaps."

He left the room and within the five minutes was back again, looking unusually grave.

"I say," he said in a low voice, coming up to Shelmore's side, "I've just found out something that's a bit—well, both serious and significant. You know that anybody who wants to keep fire-

arms nowadays has not only to take out a license, but to get police permission?"

"Of course," replied Shelmore.

"Well, I've just looked over our register," continued Mellapont. "I find that Mrs. Champernowne has a revolver. So has John Hackdale."

Shelmore reflected a moment in silence.

"Yes," he said at last, "but if—if either she or he did—what we know was done, it's not at all likely that the revolver used in doing it would be thrown away in that orchard! Is it now?"

"Quite true, it isn't. You're right there," agreed Mellapont. "However get that clerk of yours out of the way, while I make some inquiries. You don't know what he'll be getting his nose into if he stops about here. I don't want him in the town just now."

Shelmore went away to his office. He was not exactly clear in his own mind as to why Mellapont wanted to clear Simmons out of Southernstowe for forty-eight hours, but the proposal fitted in with his own inclinations; somehow or other, he scarcely knew why, he had just then no great liking for his clerk's company. And, as soon as he had gone through his letters, he turned to Simmons, proposing to get him off at once.

"Hackdale, you can leave all that for me to attend to; that and everything else," he said. "There's something I want you to do. You know that property we're negotiating about on behalf of Major Hampole?"

"The Dorsetshire property?" asked Simmons. "Yes."

"I'm not at all satisfied about the reports we've had of it," continued Shelmore. "I'd like to have it personally inspected. I want you to go off at once—this morning—and have a thorough look over it. You can catch the eleven-twenty-eight, can't you? That'll enable you to get the twelve-fourteen for Dorchester at Portsmouth."

Simmons glanced at his watch.

"Oh, yes, I can catch that," he answered. "Plenty of time. No time to see much this afternoon, though. It's a five-hour run to Dorchester."

"Of course not!" agreed Shelmore. "You'll get down there to-day and look round to-morrow and the following morning. I'll write a check for your expenses. There's no need to get home to-morrow. I want you to make a thorough inspection of that farm. See what state of repair it's in as regards buildings, fences, roads and all that—the letters about it are vague. Keep your eyes open to everything about it. Major Hampole will be calling in a few days and I want to be able to tell him the precise facts about the condition of the property he's proposing to buy."

"I understand," announced Simmons. "I'll see to it."

He presently took the check, which Shelmore wrote out, and went away to cash it at the neighboring bank and to hurry to his rooms and pack a bag. He had no objection to a mission of this sort; it meant staying at a good hotel, eating and drinking of the best, seeing new places and new people, and generally having a good time. True, he had an appointment with Miss Pretty for that evening, but he would send her a wire from Portsmouth saying that he was called away on business for a day or two; as for his other plots and plans, they must wait until he came back. With every intention of enjoying himself on the liberal amount of expense money in his pocket, he went off to the station and bought his ticket.

Five minutes later Simmons wished that he hadn't bought a ticket at all—or that he had only taken one to Portsmouth, instead of booking right through to Dorchester. This wish came into existence by his looking out of the window of his compartment at the very last moment in quest of a newspaper boy. There was no newspaper boy handy, but

Simmons saw and recognized a man who had evidently just left the train—a London-to-Portsmouth express—and who was giving the porter instructions about his suit case. A well-fed, rosy-cheeked, substantial-looking man, with a professional air. A stranger, observant people would have said, by the way he looked about him and the questions he was asking. But Simmons knew him and muttered his name in accents of anxious wonder. Mr. Palsford, solicitor, of Normansholt, head of the firm on which he, Simmons, had waited recently, at the time when Swilford Swale told him the mysterious story of Arradeane and his disappearance. Palsford, of course—no mistaking him. What was he doing there in Southernstowe?"

But Simmons' ready wit supplied the answer to the question as soon as it was asked. The dispute between Sir Reville Childerstone and his tenant at Normansholt was still going on; it was indeed more of a dispute than ever; Palsford had probably thought it well, on behalf of his client, to come and see Shelmore personally about it. For that Simmons cared nothing. Palsford or his partner or his clerks could come to Southernstowe and jaw about legal matters as much as ever they liked, for all it mattered to him. But Palsford was a Normansholt man; Palsford would know all about the Arradeane case of many years ago. Supposing, while he was in Southernstowe, he saw Mrs. Champernowne, who was always a good deal about the town, and recognized her as Mrs. Arradeane—a not unlikely thing? What would happen? Where would he, Simmons, be? Where would his rapidly maturing schemes of personal profit get to? What had seemed half an hour ago a bit of luck now seemed a misfortune. He ought to be on the spot, ready for any eventuality.

But he had not gone far; nor did he go far. He left the train at Portsmouth and, instead of catching the twelve-four-

teen to Dorchester, went to an hotel and lunched. He thought and thought—and could not decide what to do. Eventually he decided to stay in Portsmouth for the night and to consider matters more deeply. Dining early in the evening at his hotel, he subsequently went out to look for the theater. On the way Simmons got a further shock. There, on the other side of the street, he saw Bartlett in company with Superintendent Mellapont.

CHAPTER XX.

COIL WITHIN COIL.

THE comfortable and prosperous-looking gentleman whom Simmons Hackdale had recognized as Mr. Palsford, solicitor, of Normansholt, having made due inquiry at Southernstowe railway station as to the best hotel in the place, left his luggage to be sent on there and walked slowly away into the streets. In so small a town he had little difficulty in finding the office he wanted; and, before Simmons had traveled half-way to Portsmouth, Mr. Palsford was climbing the stairs which the clerk had so lately descended. He opened the door of the anteroom in which Simmons usually sat and, finding it empty, rapped on the table. Shelmore poked his head out of the inner office.

"Mr. Palsford of Normansholt," announced the caller, with a bland smile. "Mr. Shelmore, I presume?"

Shelmore looked his surprise and hastened to get his fellow solicitor inside.

"My clerk's away for the time being," he remarked, as he drew forward an easy-chair. "I only employ one at present, Mr. Palsford—early days. But what brings you into these parts?"

"I had business in London," replied Palsford with a benign smile, "and I thought when it was over that, being within sixty miles of your interesting city, I would kill three birds with one stone, Mr. Shelmore. First, I would

see Southernstowe, which I have often heard of and never seen; second, this affair between your client, Sir Reville Childerstone and my client, his tenant; the third, possibly—I say possibly—the most important of the three."

"And what's that?" asked Shelmore.

Palsford, with an enigmatic smile playing about his lips, produced a long cigarette holder, a cigarette case, and a box of matches. He continued to smile while adjusting a cigarette to the holder; he was still smiling when he had lighted the cigarette and puffed at it a little. There was something sly, confidential, and humorous about the smile, and Shelmore began to be inquisitive.

"You are a Southernstowe man, Mr. Shelmore?" suggested Palsford. "Native?"

"I am," admitted Shelmore. "Born and bred here."

"Then you know everybody. Do you know a lady here who calls herself Mrs. Champernowne?"

"Calls herself?" he exclaimed. "That implies— But yes, certainly I know Mrs. Champernowne! Who doesn't? She's mayor of Southernstowe, a very smart and capable business woman and very wealthy. What about her?"

Palsford smiled again and, producing a pocketbook, drew from among a quantity of papers a cutting which he laid on Shelmore's desk. Shelmore found himself looking at a reproduced picture of Mrs. Champernowne, beneath which were a few lines of print.

"That she?" asked Palsford laconically.

"To be sure!" said Shelmore. "A recent photograph!"

"Very good!" remarked Palsford. "Mrs. Champernowne, mayor of Southernstowe. But I knew that lady as somebody else!"

Shelmore started again, and his eyes grew incredulous; but Palsford only smiled.

"As somebody else," he repeated. "I knew her as a Mrs. Arradeane; she lived in my own town some twenty years ago. I have no more doubt that Mrs. Champernowne of Southernstowe and Mrs. Arradeane, late of Normansholt, are one and the same person than I have that that is the eminently graceful spire of Southernstowe Cathedral which I see through your window."

Shelmore was feeling as a man might feel who has been brought close to a curtain which is just about to be drawn up. What lay behind? Before he could speak, Palsford went on, tapping the scrap of paper:

"I happened to pick that up on my wife's table," he said. "I mean the paper I cut it from—a fashionable society paper. You see, Shelmore, what it announces beneath the picture—that Mrs. Champernowne is shortly to marry Sir Reville Childerstone, your client. Is that so?"

"That is so—oh, yes!" assented Shelmore.

Palsford waved his cigarette holder.

"All right," he said. "But if she's the woman I'm confident she is, she can't marry Sir Reville Childerstone nor any other man. That's flat."

"Why?" asked Shelmore.

"Because her husband's alive!" answered Palsford dryly. "That's why." Shelmore looked astounded.

"You mean that—that, if Mrs. Champernowne is really Mrs. Arradeane, there's some man named Arradeane, her husband, actually alive?" asked Shelmore. "That it?"

"Some man? A man!—the man!" said Palsford. "James Arradeane, the husband of the woman I knew as Mrs. Arradeane, and whom I believe to be identical with your Mrs. Champernowne, is, I tell you, alive. Or," he suddenly added "he was four months ago, and I haven't heard of his death."

Shelmore sat staring alternately at the photograph and at his caller. He sud-

denly turned on Palsford with an abrupt question.

"Had your Mrs. Arradeane a brother who lived with her who was known as——"

"As Mr. Alfred?", laughed Palsford. "Precisely! Has——"

"She has!" said Shelmore. "Good Lord!—this is worse than ever!"

"What's worse than ever?" demanded the visitor.

Shelmore rose from his chair, thrust his hands in his pockets, and began to pace the room, evidently deep in thought. Palsford fitted another cigarette in his holder and went on smoking quietly. At last Shelmore came back to his chair.

"Look here!" he said. "Have you read in the papers about what has been called 'The Sand-pit Mystery'—a murder case?"

"No, not that I remember," answered Palsford. "Don't read murders—no interest in 'em—not even professionally. Not my line, Shelmore."

"Nor mine," said Shelmore. "But one is sometimes forced into things. Well, it's this: A stranger, a well-to-do man, calling himself James Deane——"

"Eh!" exclaimed Palsford sharply. "James Deane?"

"James Deane," repeated Shelmore, "came to stay at the Chancellor Hotel here for a few days not very long ago, and he was murdered—shot—on the very midnight of his arrival. His dead body was found in a disused sandpit behind Mrs. Champernowne's grounds. Up to now the mystery of his death hasn't been solved, but I may tell you that there are serious grounds for believing Mrs. Champernowne to have had, if not active participation, at least complicity in the murder. Now this Deane——"

"Who was he?" Where did he come from?" asked Palsford.

"Camborne, in Cornwall," replied Shelmore. "He was part proprietor of a tin mine; his partner, a nice girl, is

staying in the town now at the Chancellor Hotel. You'll be sure to see her while you're here. She says that this man—James Deane, who'd been her father's partner and was her guardian, was by profession a mining engineer."

Palsford's countenance, usually inclined to a benevolent jollity, had become very grave. He was rubbing his chin thoughtfully.

"Odd, odd, odd!" he muttered. "A small world after all! Deuced odd!"

"You don't think this man James Deane could be the James Arradeane of whom you spoke just now?" asked Shelmore.

"No!" answered Palsford with decision. "I'll tell you straight out, Shelmore. James Arradeane, the husband of the woman we're discussing, is in Australia, and he has been there for over twenty years. I'm in communication with him four times a year. He has some property here in England which I manage. No, this man wouldn't be James Arradeane, but I've a pretty good idea who he was."

"Who?" asked Shelmore.

"My man had a cousin of the very same name," replied Palsford, "another James Arradeane who lived in London; he was a mining engineer; they both were. I've met the London man just once, some twenty years ago. But I've never heard of him since. I guess that's the man, Shelmore. He must have changed his name to Deane, left London, and gone to Cornwall. Good heavens!"

"Why should he be murdered?" asked Shelmore.

Palsford threw away his cigarette, put the holder in his pocket, and gave the younger man a keen, suggestive look.

"Probably," he answered in low tones, "probably because he knew that the other James Arradeane was alive and was threatening to stop what would have been a bigamous marriage. That's about it, Shelmore. But look here: This thing

is assuming much more serious aspects than I'd any idea of. After what I've told you, and after what you've told me, it'll have to be gone into. But let me be certain, positively certain that I'm not mistaken about the woman. I'm as confident as man can be that your Mrs. Champernowne is the Mrs. Arradeane who left Normansholt some twenty years ago, and, if I could set eyes on her——"

"You can do that within five minutes," interrupted Shelmore, glancing at his watch. "The city council is sitting now close by. Come with me and we'll just look in."

He led his visitor up the street to the city hall and into a dark corner in the public gallery of the council chamber, where Mrs. Champernowne was at that moment presiding over a debate. Within five minutes Palsford nudged his guide's elbow.

"Yes," he whispered. "Oh, yes, that's the woman. Let's get out of this."

Shelmore was only too glad to get out. The disclosures of the last few hours were beginning to confuse him; he wanted to start on the job of straightening them out. And when they left the council chamber he sheered Palsford away in the direction of Mellapont's office at the police station.

"She's very little altered," remarked Palsford, as they went away. "Wonderfully well preserved woman—always a smart, clever woman. Well, I'd no idea that I was going to be cast into a maze of this sort. Has this superintendent of yours got hold of any thread that will lead us out of it?"

"I want you to tell him all you've told me," answered Shelmore. "Of course there's a great deal that's happened here that I haven't told you of yet. You, Mellapont, and I had better have a regular consultation."

Mellapont heard all that Palsford had to say—listening in absorbed silence. In the end he asked a direct question.

"You say that this man, James Arra-

deane, whom you know at Normansholt as the husband of the woman whom we, here, know as Mrs. Champernowne, is still alive?" he said. "You're sure of it?"

"He was alive four months ago," replied Palsford. "That was when he last wrote to me. I could establish this fact of his being alive within forty-eight hours by cabling to him. He lives in Melbourne."

"What are your relations with him?" inquired Mellapont.

"When he left Normansholt," answered Palsford, "he left some property in my hands. I remit the receipts from it—rent, you know—to him every quarter."

"Under what circumstances did he leave Normansholt?" asked Mellapont. "According to what you say, he left suddenly, leaving his wife behind him, and disappeared. You aren't suggesting that it was in collusion with her?"

"No," replied Palsford. "I'll tell you all about it, and I believe—indeed, I'm sure—I'm the only person who knows the truth. To this day people in Normansholt talk about the extraordinary disappearance of James Arradeane, but nobody but myself knows anything about it. The facts are these: Arradeane, who wanted to get interested financially in coal mines in our neighborhood, came to live in Normansholt with his wife and her brother. He and his wife, it was soon well known, were both persons of considerable means—very well off. But it was also soon well known that they didn't get on together. There were various reasons. For one thing they had divergent tastes. They had no children; so there was the absence of that particular bond. He objected to her brother, from whom she wouldn't be parted—a weak, good-for-nothing idler, born to be a parasite on anybody who would keep him. Altogether things were neither smooth nor pleasant. And I very well remember that Arradeane at

last came to me and said in confidence that he'd had enough of it and was quietly going to clear out. He told me that all his affairs were in order; all his accounts squared. A certain sum of money—considerable—was paid in to his wife's separate account at her bank. He said that she had plenty of money of her own, which I already knew. He further said that he should make no fuss, no bother, no announcement, but just walk off. He did—without notice to me, and the next I heard of him he was in Melbourne, where he's been ever since."

"In his correspondence with you has he ever mentioned her?" asked Mellapont.

"Never—never once," replied Palsford. "The notion was that there should be a clean cut. And, as I tell you, it certainly was so on his part. He just vanished!"

"Did she ever make any effort to find him?" inquired Shelmore. "Was any search instituted?"

"Not while she remained in Normansholt," said Palsford. "But that was not for long. Within a very short time of his disappearance she had cleared everything up there, sold all her effects, and gone—her brother with her. And, as far as I'm concerned, I never heard anything of her until I saw that portrait in the lady's paper and recognized it. I'd no doubt about my recognition, and, now that I've seen Mrs. Champernowne in the flesh, I know she's the woman I knew at Normansholt as Mrs. Arradeane."

"Twenty years is a long time," remarked Mellapont musingly. "A very long time!"

"Oh, well," said Palsford, "if you doubt my being right, just contrive for Mrs. Champernowne to see me suddenly. If she doesn't recognize me at once, I'll eat my hat. But she will. I haven't changed much in twenty years."

"I didn't mean that you aren't right,"

replied Mellapont. "I think you are—I've no doubt you are. What I meant was that a lot can happen in twenty years. She's been here most of these years, and she has built up a big business, made a pile of money, become mayor of the city, and is contemplating marriage with a baronet."

"She can't marry him!" said Palsford. "Her husband is alive! That's probably what her cousin, the other James Arradeane, whom I take to be the murdered man, Deane, told her, or wanted to tell her. He would know."

Mellapont glanced at Shelmore and shook his head.

"Worse and worse!" he muttered. "I'm afraid there's going to be some illumination of all this that'll be a bit dazzling, eh? Mr. Palsford, you'll be staying at the Chancellor? Well, don't say a word of all this to the young lady you'll no doubt see there—Miss Pretty. Mr. Shelmore, I suppose that clerk of yours went off? All right, let me have another consultation this evening. I may—I hope to have more information by then."

"Where are you going to get it?" asked Shelmore.

"I'm going to find Bartlett and get it out of him," answered Mellapont with a grim look. "Bartlett, I'm certain, knows a lot. Let me convince him that it's in his interest to keep in with me, and Bartlett will talk. Take Mr. Palsford away, Mr. Shelmore, and post him up in every detail of the story as far as we know it. Then to-night, eh?"

CHAPTER XXI.

BARTLETT'S HEARTHTRUG.

WHILE Mellapont, Shelmore, and the north-country solicitor were discussing matters in the superintendent's private office at Southernstowe police station, Bartlett, all unconscious that he was one of the subjects of their debate, was comfortably eating his dinner at

Portsmouth. He had gone back there with his thousand pounds in his pocket and with the highly satisfactory knowledge that from that time forward John Hackdale would send him five pounds every Friday evening. He lodged the thousand pounds in his bank and had a little talk with the bank manager about investing his capital, now two thousand. But it was only a preliminary talk.

"There is no hurry," said Bartlett. Later he went to his lodgings and ordered his dinner—an unusually good one. When it was served to him he ate it with the appetite of a man who feels that he has thoroughly deserved the good things of life.

Dinner over, he mixed his midday allowance of rum, lighted his pipe, took up the newspaper, and got into his easy-chair before the fire. "Life," said Bartlett to himself, "was henceforth going to be very pleasant, blissfully comfortable." These were good lodgings; the landlady was capable and obliging; the situation quiet and respectable. He had a vision of an orderly and placid existence; as one day was, so should the next be. He would breakfast leisurely, dawdling over his eggs and bacon and the morning paper. Later he would take his constitutional; it would end at his favorite house of call; there he would have a glass or two and exchange political speculations with his fellow habitués of the bar parlor. He would go home to dinner at one o'clock and dine well. He would have a nap before the fire; he would wake to a dish of tea. The evening would find him at the favorite tavern again. There was good company there of an evening and as good talk as you would find anywhere. At half past nine he would go home to a hot supper—yes, it must be hot, every night; and then, after a nightcap of his habitual beverage—the best old Jamaica—would come bed. An ideal existence for Bartlett.

He dropped asleep over these day

dreams and the newspaper, and he slept soundly in his padded chair. And suddenly he awoke to hear a voice, the landlady's voice, which seemed at first far off and then unpleasantly near.

"Mr. Barton—Mr. Barton—there's a gentleman to see you!"

Bartlett turned confusedly, unable to remember that to his landlady and his new-found world he was Barton, and not Bartlett. Before he realized this, he was aware of something more pertinent—his caller, already in the room, was Mellapont. And somehow or other Mellapont, in mufti and looking like a highly respectable gentleman, a retired army officer or something of that sort, seemed more formidable than Mellapont in his dark-blue, black-braided uniform. But Bartlett's wits rose to the occasion, and he put a good face on things.

"Oh, how do you do, sir!" he exclaimed, rising hurriedly from his chair. "An unexpected pleasure, sir, I'm sure. A little refreshment after your journey, Mr. Mellapont. I've a drop of very good whisky in the sideboard, sir. Mrs. Capper, a clean glass or two, if you please."

"Well, I've no objection, thank you," answered Mellapont. He came forward, as the landlady left the room and gave Bartlett a meaning look. "All right, my lad!" he murmured. "Just want a bit of a talk with you—that's all. Nice situation you've got here and very comfortable rooms, eh?" he went on, as the landlady returned with a couple of glasses and a syphon of soda water. "Make yourself at home here, no doubt."

"Oh, we're quite at home here, sir—ain't we, Mrs. Capper?" responded Bartlett, with a jovial air. "Oh, yes. Allow me to help you, sir," he continued, bustling about. "Excellent whisky this, I'm told, Mr. Mellapont. Never touch it myself. I'll take a little rum with you." He handed a glass over to the visitor and gave himself a rather larger

allowance of his own spirit than usual. "My respects, Mr. Mellapont." Then, as the landlady having left them and closed the door, he turned sharply. "Nothing wrong, I hope, sir?"

Mellapont took his glass, nodded over its brim, remarked that the contents were good and relapsed into a chair, waving his host back into the one he had just vacated.

"There's a great deal wrong, Bartlett," he said. "And I've come to you because I'm certain you know things. You can help to clear up. Now I'll tell you straight out: I know a good lot about you. You've been behind the scenes in this murder affair at South-ernstowe—it's no use denying it, Bartlett."

Bartlett's nerves, shaken by Mellapont's sudden descent upon his retreat, were tightening again under the stimulus of the rum. He began to grow wary.

"I may have seen a bit, known a bit, Mr. Mellapont," he said. "The watch, for instance."

"You can leave all that out," interrupted Mellapont. "That part of it is cleared. There's no doubt we got at the truth of that in Shelmore's statement before the magistrate. Knight and the chambermaid got Deane's jewelry under the circumstances they confessed to, and in due course they'll be tried, convicted, and sentenced. But they'd nothing to do with the murder. Now, Bartlett, I'll put it straight to you—have you any idea whatever, any suspicions as to who had?"

"Suspicion's neither here nor there, Mr. Mellapont," answered Bartlett. "You might suspect a dozen people without cause. I don't know who murdered that man! I've no idea whatever."

"Very well!" said Mellapont. "Then I'm going to ask you something—after telling you something—and the last first. The other night, Bartlett, you and John Hackdale went together to Mrs. Chambernowne's house. Ashenhurst. You

were admitted. You waited in a small room in the hall, while John Hackdale went to see Mrs. Champernowne in her drawing-room. He fetched you to her after a while. Mrs. Champernowne talked to both of you. Eventually she wrote out a check which she handed to John Hackdale. He and you then left. But——"

Mellapont paused purposely. He was watching his man, with keen, searching eyes. He saw that his first words astonished Bartlett, but he also saw that, after the opening stage of astonishment had passed, it was followed by an expression of almost smug and confident assurance. It was as if Bartlett were saying to himself: "Yes, he may know that much, but that's all, and that all's nothing!" And he went on, watching his listener still more closely:

"But there's more," he said. "Next morning Hackdale cashed that check at Mrs. Champernowne's bank in South-ernstowe. It was for a thousand pounds, and he took the money in notes. And you, Bartlett, have just paid a thousand pounds into a banking account that you've started here in Portsmouth, in the name you're now living under—Barton. You paid it in in the identical notes which Hackdale received at the South-ernstowe bank. I have the numbers in my pocketbook. Now, Bartlett, my question—be careful and think about your answer—why did Mrs. Champernowne pay you a thousand pounds?"

Bartlett was astonished enough and in a bad way by this time. His hand shook, as he sat down his glass.

"We—we all have business, private business, of our own, Mr. Mellapont," he faltered. "I don't see——"

"Don't fence with me, Bartlett!" interrupted Mellapont. "You'd no business with Mrs. Champernowne! If you had business with her it wouldn't have been done in a hole-and-corner fashion. Now come—I've approached you in friendly fashion—be reasonable and let's

get at the truth. It'll pay you in the long run. Far better keep in with the law and with us, the police, than turn to crooked ways, Bartlett! Now, honestly, wasn't that thousand pounds given you as hush money?"

"I would like a definition of that term, Mr. Mellapont," said Bartlett. "Your definition!"

"Money paid to prevent exposure," answered Mellapont brusquely. "You know!"

"I don't know that I could expose anybody," retorted Bartlett. "I couldn't!"

"Then you tell me what the money was paid for," said Mellapont. "If for a genuine business deal of which you're not ashamed, tell me in confidence—it'll go no further."

"I've no permission to do that, Mr. Mellapont," replied Bartlett. "There are always two parties to a transaction. Supposing I am one in this case, there's still another. If I'm willing to tell you, perhaps the other party isn't."

Mellapont leaned forward. "Look here, Bartlett," he said earnestly; "let me tell you something: You're in a very risky position—a very dangerous position. I'm not afraid of being candid with you, and I'll just tell you how things stand. You know that Deane was found murdered, shot by a revolver, in a sand pit just behind Mrs. Champernowne's house and grounds. Now I'll tell you of certain facts—facts—that are in our possession. Deane was with Mrs. Champernowne in her grounds that night; he was seen talking to her. The revolver with which he was probably shot has been found in Mrs. Champernowne's orchard. Mrs. Champernowne holds a police certificate for a revolver; this revolver so found may be hers. There's a prima-facie case of grave suspicion against Mrs. Champernowne; for, according to evidence put into my hands this very morning, she'd good reason for wishing to rid herself of, or to silence,

the murdered man. Now, Bartlett, you listen to me more carefully than ever. If Mrs. Champernowne is arrested on this charge and if she's found guilty, and if it's found that she gave you hush money to keep you quiet about something you know, you'll let yourself in for—do you know what, Bartlett?"

Bartlett was listening more carefully than ever, and he was conscious that Mellapont was gradually scoring points against him in his verbal encounter. But he still strove to affect a polite indifference.

"Can't say that I do, sir," he answered. "I'm not a lawyer, you know, Mr. Mellapont."

"No doubt!" agreed Mellapont. "But that plea wouldn't stand you in any stead. Every Englishman is supposed to know the law, and he can't plead ignorance as a defense. Bartlett, do you know what an accessory is?"

"Not in legal parlance, sir—not in legal parlance," said Bartlett.

"Then I'll tell you," continued Mellapont. "An accessory is one who, though not the principal in a felony, and even absent at the time of its committal, has nevertheless been covered with the crime, either before or after the fact. After—mind that, Bartlett—after, as well as before. Now what is it to be an accessory after the fact? It's to be one who, knowing that a felony has been committed, assists, relieves, or protects the felon. Just get that into your head."

"I don't know of any felony having been committed," said Bartlett. "And I've neither assisted, relieved, or protected anybody."

"Not by silence?" asked Mellapont sharply. "Come—why did Mrs. Champernowne give you a thousand pounds? Bartlett, you'd better be careful! Think again!"

Bartlett thought—for a few minutes.

"Do you really mean," he said at last, "do you really mean—no bluff, Mr.

Mellapont, if you please—that if Mrs. Champernowne were found guilty of this, and it was discovered that I knew—well, just something—some little thing—I should be liable to what you're talking about?"

"I do," answered Mellapont. "Most certainly! If you know anything—anything, however small against her and conceal it from us, you're assisting and protecting her. That's so!"

"You think things will come out against her?" asked Bartlett uneasily.

"From certain facts put before me this very day, yes," replied Mellapont.

Once more Bartlett assumed his thinking cap. After all, if Mrs. Champernowne were convicted, which now seemed likely, his weekly stipend would come to an end. On the other hand, if he told Mellapont what he knew, his information would qualify him for the reward offered by Miss Pretty, and a bird in the hand—

"Mr. Mellapont," he said suddenly, "if I tell you all I do know—all—will it be confidential?"

"As far as justice will allow, yes."

"I don't know that my name need be brought in," remarked Bartlett. "But another thing—if I do tell you, will you back me up in putting in for that second reward of the young lady's—Miss Pretty's? She offered a thousand pounds to anybody who saw and spoke to Deane on the night of the murder."

"Don't mind doing that," said Mellapont. "I'd as soon see you have Miss Pretty's money as anybody else. She's a bit of fool in my opinion. Why, Bartlett, did you see and speak to him?"

"I did!" answered Bartlett readily enough at last. "I did, sir; and that's literally all I know. He met me near North Bar just about midnight and asked me to tell where Ashenhurst House, Mrs. Champernowne's residence, was. I told him. He went in that direction. Two nights later I heard of the murder and knew that the dead man

must be the man who'd stopped me—the description tallied. Just after I'd heard, I met John Hackdale on his beat, as special constable. I told him what I've told you. He begged me to keep my mouth shut and gave me—I should say all the money he had in his pocket. Next day—night—he came to me with a hundred and fifty pounds and told me that if I'd go to America with it and stop there, he'd cable me the same amount as soon as he heard that I'd landed in New York. I promised. He'd no sooner gone than I heard of Miss Pretty's offer of a reward. That roused me.

"Instead of going to Southampton I came here and waited and watched the papers. Mere chance gave me that opportunity as regards the watch and those two people from the Chancellor—Kight and Sanders. I got the reward from Miss Pretty for that—the thousand offered about the jewelry. When I sent to Southernstowe about that affair, John Hackdale saw me and was taken aback because I hadn't gone to America. He took me to Mrs. Champernowne's house. I saw her with him, as you say. But she never mentioned anything to me, Mr. Mellapont—I mean as regards why I was to keep my mouth shut. All she did was to give me through Hackdale that thousand pounds and the promise of a weekly pension. And that's all—all!"

Mellapont was thinking—thinking hard. His thoughts were chiefly on John Hackdale. He remembered that the sand pit and its surroundings were in John Hackdale's beat; that it was John Hackdale who found the dead man; that John Hackdale had concealed the fact that he knew a man, Bartlett, who had met and spoken with Deane; altogether it was obvious that John Hackdale had played a double game. And then he suddenly remembered, too, that John Hackdale held a police certificate for a revolver.

"Um!" he said, waking out of his reverie. "So it was John Hackdale who acted as principal in all this, Bartlett, until that last interview, eh? And that's really all you know—all?"

"All, Mr. Mellapont!" protested Bartlett. "Doesn't seem much, does it?"

"Um!" murmured Mellapont. "That remains to be seen." He pulled out his watch. "I must get to the station and back to Southernstowe," he said. "Walk with me. I want to ask you a few more questions."

Bartlett went with him. Simmons Hackdale, lounging around, saw them together. He saw them part at the entrance to the station. And once Superintendent Mellapont had taken a seat in the next train for Southernstowe, Simmons also took one—further back. It seemed to him that an astute general like himself should be on the battlefield, in the thick of things.

To be concluded in next week's issue of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE.

ANOTHER COUNTERFEIT NOTE DISCOVERED

ACCORDING to a bulletin issued a short time ago by the Treasury Department the latest counterfeit \$10 Federal Reserve note should be readily recognized. The note, which is on the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, bears the check letter, "D," face plate No. 278, and back plate No. 551. The note bears the signatures of D. F. Houston, Secretary of the Treasury, and John Burke, Treasurer of the United States, also a portrait of Jackson, which is an especially poor likeness. The counterfeit is apparently printed from etched plates on a single piece of paper, ink lines being used to imitate the silk fiber of the genuine. The note has been made so poorly that its spurious character should be readily recognized.

Jerry, the Boaster

by Harrington Strong

Author of "The Unwiped Blade," etc.

CHAPTER I.

ONCE TOO OFTEN.

FOR a moment Jerry Tandon crouched in the darkness of the theater office before the safe, scarcely daring to breathe, listening intently, with a sudden fear clutching at his little black heart. But it was only for a moment. No sound came to thrill him with alarm again, no footstep to frighten him, no stentorian command for him to elevate his hands and surrender.

The flash of light that he had dreaded for an instant did not come to reveal him in a compromising position. And Jerry Tandon told himself that he had been a fool. If he really had heard a noise, it had been some natural one, possibly made by scampering rats, and had nothing at all to do with his presence there in the office of the big theater.

Yet he listened intently for a moment before he turned toward the open safe again. His lips were curled in a sneer of defiance at things in general. His mental vision was distorted, for his mind was as black as his heart. He seemed to be feeling a premonition, though he would have been unable to explain what a premonition was had he been asked. Jerry Tandon would have called it a "hunch." And his present hunch had been that there was trouble in the air, and that it was directed toward him.

He remembered, though, that he had felt that way often while at work on a

big job. One reason for it, he supposed, was that he always worked alone instead of with a companion in crime, and did not have the satisfaction of knowing that there was some clever lookout protecting him, ready to signal him if danger was near. For Jerry Tandon assumed that all other men were of the same ilk.

And now he remembered, also, what an old crook had told him less than a week before—that once too often he would plan and carry out a crime and boast of it afterward. For he was known as "Jerry, the Boaster" to crooks and the police alike. It was an alias in which he gloried. He liked to boast of his crimes and his cruelty. But he always did his boasting in the presence of only one man, at a time and in places that he deemed were safe.

Now he flashed his electric torch cautiously once more, shielding the light with one side of his coat, and bent toward the safe again. This haul was going to be a good one. For some time Jerry Tandon had been watching this big theater and making his plans for a raid. He knew as well as the manager of the theater that all the receipts for Saturday and Sunday were kept in the office safe to be banked Monday morning. And this was Sunday night—or, rather, Monday morning at almost two o'clock.

Jerry Tandon stuffed his pockets with the currency that he took from the safe, which was considerable. He took only a small amount of the silver, knowing that it would be difficult to carry. He esti-

mated that the haul was about three thousand dollars, the biggest part of the gross receipts of three theatrical performances. Jerry Tandon was glad that the show now running at the theater was a good one and attracted the public, and that there had been a heavy Saturday matinée.

The currency safely stowed away in his pockets, Jerry Tandon closed the door of the safe and then whirled the combination knob. He wanted things to look as natural as possible. He knew that it was good business policy to delay the discovery of the crime as long as he could. Opening that safe had taken considerable time, though it had not been at all difficult. Jerry Tandon knew a great deal about safes.

And Jerry Tandon was not the man to leave his finger prints scattered around, either, knowing that it would be the same as leaving his calling card. Jerry Tandon's finger prints were well known. They were on file down at police headquarters, and there were men down there who would rejoice if they could catch him with the goods again, particularly a certain detective, Walt Bryan. Tandon snarled when he thought of Bryan, the bulldog of the force, the man who never quit, and who had sworn to get him. Bryan had gone out of his way to make the attempt, but so far it had come to naught. Jerry Tandon considered that he was too clever for Detective Walt Bryan.

Snapping off his electric torch, Tandon slipped it back into one of his pockets. But he did not strip off the thin rubber gloves that he was wearing; he would not remove them until just before he left the building. He did not intend to grow careless and leave his finger prints on any of the woodwork.

Jerry buttoned his coat and crept silently through the darkness to the door of the office. There he stopped to listen for a time, but heard nothing. Cautiously he opened the door and stepped

out, closing the door behind him again. Now he was in the foyer of the theater. He would follow a side aisle down to the stage, descend into the dressing rooms, and then leave the building through a little window that opened into the dark alley.

Once in the alley he could make his way to the street and hurry along it to the furnished room that he called home. Jerry had prepared a way of hiding the currency so that it could not be found in case of a search by the police, and he would keep it hidden as long as there was any danger of the crime being traced to him. He had an alibi prepared, too. Three men would be ready to testify that Jerry Tandon had been playing poker with them in a little back room of a cheap lodging house. The three men actually were there now, playing poker. It cost Jerry Tandon something, but the protection was worth it. Not that he trusted the three men! But, in addition to the money that he gave them, he "had something" on each of the three, and they certainly did not want him to tell what he knew.

Again he stopped to listen. There was an old watchman in the theater, Jerry Tandon knew, but he also knew the watchman's habits fairly well. The old fellow generally spent the greater part of the night at the stage-door entrance, reading and smoking, getting up a few times during the night to ring in his report and to walk through the theater on the lookout for fire. About this time, Jerry judged, the old watchman would be eating his midnight lunch. And he would be on the opposite side of the stage.

"Might as well be goin'," Jerry Tandon muttered to himself. "This has been a cinch." He started forward, walking upon the toes of his shoes, making very little noise, and with every sense alert. He came in time to the head of the aisle and started to turn down it toward the front of the house.

Again the premonition clutched at his heart for an instant, and Jerry Tandon stopped abruptly. At the same moment there came to his ears a soft "click," and the corner of the theater in which he stood was bathed suddenly in bright light.

Jerry Tandon gave a little cry of fright and recoiled, his right hand darting toward his coat pocket. Before him stood the old watchman, one hand on an electric-light switch, the other holding a revolver.

"Once too often!" flashed through Jerry Tandon's mind, as he crouched against the wall.

CHAPTER II.

A MOMENT OF TERROR.

THE old watchman had been engaged to watch out for fire more than anything else. He was aged and infirm, an old actor known to hundreds of the profession. Younger men and women of the theater adored him, listened with interest to his reminiscences, and asked him for advice.

Though he carried a revolver and handcuffs and wore the star of a special officer, the old watchman never had expected to come face to face with a desperate criminal. And the first glance told him that Jerry Tandon was desperate, that he had come from the office, and probably had been robbing the safe.

Jerry Tandon's little eyes glittered in his white face; his yellow teeth showed in a quick snarl. But the watchman did not hesitate, now that he faced a duty. He removed his hand from the electric switch and advanced a couple of paces, holding the revolver so that its muzzle menaced Jerry Tandon's breast.

"What are you doin' here?" the watchman demanded.

Jerry Tandon recovered a certain amount of composure. He sensed that the old man before him was not an experienced officer. Perhaps there would

be a chance of escape, if he played the game carefully. Surely, he thought, he could outwit an ancient watchman.

"Oh, I've always liked the theater," Jerry Tandon replied, trying to grin. "I was just lookin' around. You've got quite a nice place here."

"You've been in the office," the old watchman accused. "You've been at the safe. You're a housebreaker. We'll just call for the police."

Jerry Tandon was suddenly alarmed. He felt cornered. And he told himself that it was ridiculous to let himself be cornered by such a man. Currency from the safe was in Jerry's pockets. If the police were called there could be but one ending to this—a long term in State's prison. Jerry was thinking rapidly as the old watchman wasted a moment in indecision.

"You've got me," Jerry said frankly. "Yes, I've tapped the safe. But what do you care?"

"Why, you——" the old watchman began.

"Just a moment, now, before you explode. You're a watchman, workin' for about seventy a month and maybe less," Jerry said. "What do you care how much coin the big boss loses? He's got his thousands, I reckon, and he don't give you very much for stayin' awake all night around here. Maybe we can come to terms."

"What do you mean?"

"How about a little split?" Jerry Tandon asked, leering. "What good will it do you to call the coppers and hand me over? That won't get you anything. The boss may pat you on the back for catchin' me, and maybe he'll just cuss you out for lettin' me get in here in the first place. If we can fix up a little split——"

"You mean to give me some of the money?"

"That's the talk," Jerry whispered. "I got a haul of about three thousand, I think. Of course, I did all the work,

Suppose I count you off about a thousand and let you hide it somewhere around the stage. Then I'll tie and gag you and skip. They'll find you in the mornin', or maybe later to-night if they investigate because you don't ring in your report. Then you'll have the thousand, and nobody'll suspect you if you're found bound and gagged. You can tell some kind of story. There's a scheme! They may fire you, but what of it? You'll have the thousand."

"Why, you low-down crook," the old watchman cried.

"Maybe I might make it fifteen hundred."

"Not for a million! This is a theater. Understand? A theater! I've worked in theaters all my life. Theater folks stick together, you crook. Let you rob a box office and then split with you? Why you——"

Jerry Tandon saw that he was on the wrong track. He failed to understand loyalty such as this, but he realized that he had made a mistake, that his method of approach had been wrong.

"You just think of that thousand," he said. "You could do a lot of things with a thousand, couldn't you? In the theater all your life, huh? And what has it got you? You're a simp! All your life workin' for the theater, and you've got nothin' but a night-watchman's job."

"Your kind wouldn't understand," the old watchman told him frankly. "No decent man would expect you to understand. Now you turn around and walk back to the office door, and you keep your hands up, and be mighty careful about it. The telephone is in the office. March!"

Jerry Tandon hesitated only a moment. He did not like the sudden, hostile gleam in the old watchman's eyes. He turned around and walked slowly back toward the office as the watchman had indicated; he was desperate in truth, now. He had spent one short

term in prison, and he never had forgotten the horror of it. And now a vision of it came to him, and he shuddered. And, if they sent him there again, it would be for a long term.

"I've noticed you hangin' around the theater the last week or so," the old watchman was saying. "You've been plannin' this thing for some time, I suppose. Well, you'll go to prison now. You'll learn not to steal from a theater, all right!"

Jerry Tandon found himself shivering again at the watchman's words. They meant that he was recognized; that, even if he managed to make an escape now, they would capture him later because of the description the watchman would give. Probably Detective Walt Bryan would catch him! Again came the thought of the big prison and what a term of years behind its walls would mean. Jerry Tandon never had killed a man, but he felt that this was the time to do it, if he could manage to catch the watchman off guard. He must be silenced forever, if Jerry was to remain free.

If he could settle the watchman and get back to his room he would be safe. The three men who were standing alibi for him would be ready with their testimony. The police would not be able to fasten the crime on him then.

"Stop!" the watchman commanded suddenly. "Open the door."

Jerry Tandon reached forward, turned the knob, and threw the door open. The old watchman stepped closer, still alert, still holding the revolver in a menacing position.

"You reach just inside that door, on your right, and throw on the lights," the watchman instructed. "You'll find the button there. Make it quick!"

The old watchman was trembling, and his face was white and his lips quivering. But he was determined to do his duty. He would call for the police and hand this man over to them. Catching

burglars was not his business, but he could do it when called upon to do so in the line of duty.

"Make it quick!" he commanded again.

Jerry Tandon leaned against the side of the door and reached his hand inside. "Can't find the switch," he whispered hoarsely.

The old watchman took a step nearer. "On the right side, and just about even with your shoulder," he instructed. "The button's there. Turn on those lights!"

As he finished speaking, Jerry Tandon whirled suddenly, ducked low, and sprang! He tore the revolver from the old watchman's grasp and hurled it to one side. With the next movement he grasped the watchman by the throat. A knife flashed in the fitful and uncertain light that came from the head of the aisle.

One groan came from the throat of the old watchman, and he sank to the floor. A single glance was enough to tell Jerry Tandon that he had done his work only too well. The watchman never would tell the police that Jerry Tandon had been prowling around the theater for a week or so, and that he had been caught there after robbing the safe.

Now that it was done Jerry shivered for a moment, and then darted back to the head of the aisle and turned off the light. He listened intently for a time, but heard nothing. Snapping on his electric torch, he hurried back to the side of his victim, kneeled, and cleaned the blade of the knife on the old watchman's coat. He forced himself to take plenty of time and make a good job of it; he could not leave the knife, for he had owned it for a long time. Many men had seen it in his possession and it might be traced to him. He made certain that there were no crimson stains remaining on the blade or the handle, and then closed the knife and put it

back into his pocket. He inspected his clothing carefully, but found no stains. There were some stains upon the rubber gloves, but he intended to discard those.

Now he went swiftly to the head of the aisle, and along it toward the stage. He flashed his torch when it was necessary, and stopped now and then to listen. Down in the dressing rooms he tore off the rubber gloves and threw them aside. He did not worry about the gloves, knowing that they could not be traced.

In a short time he found himself at the little window. He was eager to be away from the scene, wanted to get back to his little room and hide the currency and get to bed, and then he would feel safe. But he forced himself to stop at the window and make another careful inspection.

Sure that there were no stains upon his clothing, Jerry Tandon took a deep breath, then forced his breathing to normal. Then he opened the little window and crawled through it and into the darkness of the alley. There he stopped another moment to brush the dust from his clothes.

He crept through the darkness to the side street and peered around the corner of the building. There was no pedestrian in sight, no vehicle. Jerry Tandon slipped quickly into the street and started to walk briskly yet naturally along it. He reached the corner, turned into the wider street, and continued toward his lodging place. He was commencing to feel safe now. The horror had passed. Only the money in his pocket could fasten guilt upon him now, he told himself. If he could get safely home with the money and have time to hide it, he would be prepared to face any inquiry. Did he not have an excellent alibi?

This would be something to boast about afterward, Jerry Tandon thought. This was a real exploit. To take a life after being caught in robbery, and to

escape the consequences was something that not every man could do.

On he went up the street. He began whistling softly as he hurried along. Two more blocks up the avenue and he would turn into another and narrower thoroughfare and soon be at home, and safe.

A man stepped from a dark doorway ahead of him. "Hello, Jerry!" he said.

Jerry Tandon stopped abruptly. His heart seemed to cease beating for an instant; he had a moment of terror. The man standing before him was Detective Walt Bryan!

CHAPTER III.

UNDER SUSPICION.

TWO things saved Jerry Tandon for a moment. The first was the fact that it was dark in the street, and while the detective was able to recognize him, yet he could not see Jerry Tandon's face plainly and read the signs of terror in it. The second was Jerry's hatred for this man, a thing that put him instantly upon the defensive and caused his wits to work.

There was silence for a moment as Detective Walt Bryan stepped nearer.

"Out a bit late, aren't you, Tandon?" he asked.

"Yeh," Jerry replied easily, though his heart was hammering at his ribs. "Been in a poker game."

"Are you certain that it wasn't some other kind of a game?" the detective demanded. "I wouldn't put much of anything past you, Tandon."

"You'd better lay off me, Bryan," Jerry Tandon replied, showing some anger. "You're always pesterin' around me instead of bein' busy chasin' regular crooks. Just because I made a little slip a few years ago and got eighteen months in stir——"

"We can do without the comedy, Tandon," the detective told him. "Tell it to somebody who'll appreciate it, and be-

lieve it. I'll admit, Tandon, that you're a smooth article, and that I haven't caught you with the goods—yet. But I know, just the same, that you are turning tricks continually. And one of these days——"

Jerry Tandon snarled at him like a beast. "Wait until you catch me, then!" he said.

"Where did you say that you'd been?"

"I didn't say. I've been playing poker, but you needn't think that I'll tell you where."

"You needn't be afraid to tell me. I'm not raiding dinky poker games," Detective Bryan told him. "It looks a little suspicious to see you prowling around at this late hour. Maybe you've been where you don't belong."

"If you think so, take me in," Jerry Tandon said boldly. "Go on and make a laughingstock of yourself. I'll be able to dig up an alibi, all right."

"If you say so, I don't doubt it, Jerry," the detective said. "But one of these days you're going to find that you need more than a fake alibi. I ought to take you in for vagrancy, but I'll wait and get you for something more serious."

Detective Bryan scowled at him and walked on down the street. Jerry Tandon felt as though a weight had been lifted off his chest. He had experienced real terror for a moment. If Bryan had taken him in, if he had been searched and all that money had been found on him, he'd have been in for it!

Jerry hurried on to the lodging house and got into his room. He did not turn on the light at first, not until he had hidden the money in a hollow space in the floor, and had fixed the loose board securely over it again. Not a single bill of the loot did he retain in his pocket.

Then he undressed and crept into bed, but for a time he could not sleep. He lived again through the adventure of the night. He tried to think of something that he had left undone, some precau-

tion that he had failed to take, and he could not. His plans for the robbery of the theater had been perfect; his alibi was ready if the police questioned him. The murder of the old night watchman had been only an extra incident which did not change things at all.

Yet Jerry Tandon worried considerably about it. He got out of bed once and turned on the light, put a towel over the keyhole, and once more inspected the knife that he had used. There was not a spot upon it, and none upon his clothing.

"Nothin' to be nervous about," he told himself.

Back to the bed he went, and after a time he fell asleep, almost exhausted. It was a few minutes past the noon hour when he awoke. He sat on the edge of the bed for a time, again living through the scenes of the night before. Repeatedly he told himself that he had a perfect alibi if the police saw fit to bother him, that all he had to do was keep his nerve. They wouldn't be able to find the money. There was nothing at all to connect him with the crime except the fact that Detective Walt Bryan had met him but a few blocks from the theater in the early morning hours.

He smoked a cigarette, dressed, descended the rickety stairs of the lodging house, and went to a little restaurant on the corner, where he ate breakfast.

Lighting another cigarette he walked slowly down the street, intending to run across one of the three men who were handling his alibi, and have a talk. At the first corner a hand halted him.

Inwardly Jerry Tandon flinched. But he did not betray the shock he had felt. He merely turned around slowly, to find a detective he knew standing there. Jerry grinned. "Tryin' to throw a scare into me?" he asked.

The detective did not respond to the grin. His attitude seemed to be strictly businesslike. "They want to see you down at headquarters, Jerry," he said.

"Want to see me?" Jerry gasped out. "At headquarters? Why do they want to see me?"

"I suppose that you'll find that out when you get down there," the officer replied. "I just got word to pick you up if I could. Let's go!"

Jerry Tandon insisted on engaging a taxicab at his own expense. During the long, slow ride to police headquarters he maintained an ordinary conversation, while the detective engaged in monosyllables only.

"I'm gettin' sick of this bein' picked up all the time," Jerry complained. "Just because I was in a stir once they nab me every time some crook turns a trick. I'm gettin' mighty sick of it, I tell you. I've a notion to quit the town!"

"Maybe there wouldn't be a lot of regrets," the detective said. "Here we are, Jerry."

Jerry Tandon walked beside the detective into the building, down a long corridor, and into a little room. Jerry Tandon knew instantly what that room meant—a lot of questioning. They waited there in silence for several minutes, and then a captain of detectives came in, glared at Jerry, and sat down before the desk.

Jerry maintained a determined silence.

"Well, young man," he snapped out.

"This copper picked me up on the street," Jerry complained. "He said that you wanted to see me about somethin'. I'm gettin' sick of it. I'm picked up every couple o' weeks."

"Uh-huh," the captain grunted. "There's a little matter that I want to speak to you about, Tandon."

"Yeh?"

"A little matter of murder."

There was silence for a moment, and then Jerry Tandon, steeling himself against any show of emotion, against making a mistake, laughed lightly.

"Murder? I don't know anything about any murder," he declared. "I

ain't ever heard of any. I reckon that's out of my line."

"But robbery isn't," the captain snapped out. "You're a thief and a burglar!"

"There you go. Just because I was caught once——"

"Stop it! I know what you are, Tandon, as well as you do yourself. The box office at the National Theater was robbed some time last night. The watchman was killed—stabbed. What have you got to say about it?"

Jerry Tandon looked him straight in the eyes.

"Why ask me?" he wanted to know. "I'm not in the theater business. It's none of my affair."

"No?" the captain questioned.

"No!" Jerry Tandon replied firmly.

"What's the big idea, cap? Tryin' to hang somethin' on me? Do you think that I had anything to do with the job? Robbin' a big theater and killin' a watchman? That game's too big for me!"

The captain of detectives eyed him for a moment and then touched a button. A door opened and Detective Walt Bryan stepped into the room.

CHAPTER IV.

THE KILLER.

ONCE more Jerry Tandon felt like a cornered rat. His little eyes grew smaller and blazed, and he licked at his dry lips and twisted in his chair. Detective Bryan stepped across to the desk, looked at the captain, and then faced the culprit.

"Tandon, I met you about two o'clock this morning within three blocks of the theater," Bryan said.

"Sure you did! Sure!" Jerry explained. "What of it? You stopped me and asked where I'd been, and I said playin' poker."

"Where were you playing poker, and when?" the detective asked. "And with whom?"

"Let me see. I reckon it was about half past nine when I met some of the boys, and we decided to have a little game."

"Where did you play and with whom?"

Jerry Tandon gave an address, mentioned a little back room, and named the three men he had engaged to furnish his alibi. Bryan made a few notes and left the office. He was gone for several minutes, and Jerry Tandon knew well that he had instructed other officers to pick up the three men, to make inquiries at the lodging house to check up on that alibi.

When Detective Bryan returned he sat down at one end of the desk and glared across at Tandon. "You'd better come clean, Jerry," he said. "It may get you a life sentence instead of the electric chair. That chair isn't a pretty thing, Tandon!"

"I tell you that I didn't have anything to do with it," Tandon shrieked. "Just because I got in trouble once, you pick me up. I wouldn't tackle a big job like that if I was broke flat and simply had to have money. And I—I simply couldn't kill a man."

"You'd kill, all right, if you were cornered," Bryan told him. "That old watchman, Jerry, was the pet of the theatrical profession in this town. There's a big howl about his murder. He was a kind, lovable old man. The fellow who knifed him is a beast! His murder will stir this town as much as though the mayor had been shot down on the street. And we're going to get the man who did it, Tandon!"

"Get him, but don't bother me about it," Jerry said. "I'm not the only man in town."

Bryan and the captain looked straight at him, and then, without a word, they got up and left the room, closing the door behind them. That did not fool Jerry Tandon in the least. He knew very well that in some fashion they

could watch him, see his every movement, observe the expression in his face; they were giving him a chance to convict himself.

So Jerry Tandon rolled and lighted a cigarette, made himself as comfortable as possible in the chair, and did his best to appear unconcerned. They'd not catch him! It was easy, he told himself. All that he had to do was to be careful, be alert, and remain always on guard until he was under suspicion no longer.

An hour passed. Tandon smoked more cigarettes. Once he got up and looked at some pictures on the walls of the room. Once the captain of detectives came in and got something from his desk and went out again without speaking.

Jerry Tandon would have grinned except that he was afraid they might see him. So he merely acted bored.

Another hour passed. In another room Bryan and the captain were considering the reports they had received. The three men had asserted that Jerry had been playing cards with them. This looked like sufficient proof.

There was other evidence backing up the alibi. Tandon's room had been searched and nothing incriminating found there.

"Cap, I'm sure he did it!" Bryan declared. "And we've got to get our man. Everybody liked that old watchman, and the newspapers will make it hot for us if we don't get the murderer. I'll have the men working with me go out after other clues, of course. But I'm going to keep after Tandon. I've got a little scheme of my own."

"Let's hear it, Bryan."

Detective Bryan spoke at length.

"All right," the captain said when he had done. "Go ahead with it."

The captain went back to the little room and looked down at Jerry Tandon again.

"We've checked up on your story,

and it seems good, Tandon," he said. "You can go."

"All right. I wish you'd stop your men pickin' me up every few days, though."

"They'll pick you up any time there is a reason to suspect you, Tandon. That's all!"

Jerry Tandon pretended to be angry as he left headquarters. He traveled uptown to his own district, and not until he was some distance away did he allow himself the luxury of a smile. It had been easy! They would watch him for a time, naturally, but he was prepared for that. He would be careful, behave himself, make no slip!

Now he had something to boast about. Only he would wait for a time before boasting. The police were blind fools! Detective Walt Bryan was the worst of the lot. A gang of numskulls drawing pay from the city!

Jerry Tandon spent the afternoon loitering around his usual haunts. He knew well that he was being watched, but he did not care. And he did not return to his room, for that would have been unusual at that time of the day. He knew very well that the room had been searched, and that the police had found nothing. Had they found the money he would not be at liberty now.

At dusk he ate a meal in the usual restaurant, then wandered down the street again, greeting acquaintances here and there, trying to act in a manner perfectly natural. For a time he stood in front of a billiard parlor, watching the passing throng. It had been something of an ordeal, and Jerry Tandon felt in need of a "bracer." So he went to a rear room of the billiard establishment and procured a couple of drinks of illicit liquor. Then he returned to his lounging place in front.

A man turning in from the street jostled against him, turned, and glared. "Tryin' to take up the whole street?" he demanded.

"What's the matter with you?" Jerry wanted to know.

He did not know the man who had jostled him. The stranger seemed angry about something. He glared at Jerry for an instant, and then swung a fist in a ferocious blow.

Jerry Tandon snarled and returned the attack. In an instant the two men were the center of a crowd. Two patrolmen forced their way to the center and separated the combatants.

"Come along!" one of them commanded.

"I'm not the man you want," Jerry said. "This fellow started the row."

"You come along, Tandon! You've been drinking," one of the policemen said. "I can smell it on your breath!"

Jerry and the other man made the journey in a patrol. An officer sat between them. They reached the station and were taken inside.

Once more Jerry Tandon started to explain. He offered cash bail on the charge of fighting and disturbing the peace. But the desk sergeant refused it.

"You're drunk," he said.

"I'm not drunk," Jerry declared.

"You'll stay in a cell for a while, anyway," the desk sergeant told him.

Jerry found himself put into a large cell in which there was no other prisoner. It was a detention cell, in a room where no other men were incarcerated. Jerry sniffed at the back of the retreat-jailer.

He understood it, he told himself. This was a frame-up. They were sore at headquarters because they could not fasten that robbery and murder on him. This was old stuff. Possibly they'd even take a minor revenge by jailing him for a few months for vagrancy.

Jerry Tandon felt like grinning. He did not relish spending a few months in jail, but it would be better than standing trial for robbery and murder. It would make him safe. If they did that, it was

a sign that they could not touch him for the other.

"Fools!" Jerry Tandon scoffed. "I'll get that Bryan one of these days—like I got the watchman!"

Which shows that Jerry Tandon had taken the last step. He had become a killer.

CHAPTER V.

TANDON BOASTS.

THE jailer had allowed him to retain tobacco and matches. Jerry Tandon rolled and smoked a cigarette, and then threw himself upon the hard bunk in one corner of the cell.

Mentally he was sneering at the police again. They were no match for him! Here he had got away with the greatest crime of all, and had dodged them. He had met Bryan when he had his pockets stuffed with stolen currency, and Bryan had not even searched him. The police were fools!

The soul of the boaster surged up within him again, but he had nobody to whom he could boast. They might throw him into jail for three months, or even six, for vagrancy, but he cared little for that. When he came out he would have about three thousand dollars to enjoy, and he would be safe as far as the greater crime was concerned.

He slept for a time, and then got up and smoked again, and walked around the cell, wondering whether they would have him in the night court or merely keep him there until morning and let him go.

It was perhaps two in the morning, and Jerry Tandon was preparing to get some more sleep, when the corridor door opened and the jailer and another officer appeared suddenly with a struggling captive in their midst.

Jerry Tandon sat up and showed sudden interest. The prisoner seemed to be past middle age, and quite a large man. He was putting up a struggle, and a good one.

The jailer unlocked the door and tossed the prisoner inside. He was upon his feet again instantly, shaking at the bars, screeching maledictions at the officers. They laughed and went back along the corridor, closed the door, and locked it. The latest arrival turned around and regarded Jerry Tandon.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"What do you care?" Jerry asked.

"Not much! But I'd like to kill a couple of those cops. Run a man like me in, will they?"

"Why not?" Jerry asked, laughing.

"They ran me in."

"You!" the other said sneeringly.

"You? Drunk and fightin', I suppose, or maybe just a suspect. You! Huh!"

"Well, don't get your back up about it," Jerry cautioned. "Who are you, the governor of the State?"

"Huh! Wouldn't you like to know! Wouldn't those coppers like to know!" the new prisoner said. "Run me in. Do you know what they did to me? Ran me in because I wouldn't move on quick enough to suit some new dude of a patrolman! Me!"

"Yeh? Who're you?"

"I'm Alex—that's enough!"

"That don't tell me anything," Jerry said, grinning. He had seen these outbursts before. Alex evidently thought that he was far too important to be arrested. It made Jerry Tandon want to laugh. Alex, and his importance!

"I wouldn't have cared so much if they'd arrested me for somethin' important," Alex declared. "But if my friends ever hear of this they'll laugh me out of the country. Pinched for refusin' to move on! By a common cop in uniform! And then put in a detention cell—with you!"

"What's the matter with me?" Jerry wanted to know.

"You're a bum—a common bum," Alex told him. "Put in a cell with a common drunk! I'll get square with these coppers if it takes me ten years."

"Say, where do you get that common-bum stuff?" Jerry Tandon demanded angrily. "You're not so much!"

"I said a common bum, but that's what I meant," Alex declared. "It's a dirty insult. Wouldn't take bail, either. Haul me up to the night court, I suppose, and fine me ten. It's a disgrace! Pinched by a common cop and put in a cell with a bum!"

"You lay off that bum stuff," Jerry demanded.

"Why should I?" Alex asked hotly.

"That's what you are, ain't it?"

"Yeh? And who are you to talk so big?" Jerry Tandon wanted to know.

Alex stopped pacing the cell and stood before him. The expression in his face changed, and cunning showed there. He stepped nearer. "Wouldn't you like to know," he said.

"I think you're a bluff, if you want to know," Jerry Tandon said.

"Yeh?" Alex looked quickly around. Then he stepped still nearer and lowered his voice. "Let me tell you this, lad," he said. "If these birds knew who they were entertainin', they'd give me a special cell and maybe put a guard in front of it!"

"Don't make me laugh," Jerry implored.

"Think I'm a nobody?" Alex stormed. "You listen to me, lad. I'm wanted in a dozen towns. I can crack any safe that ever was made. And I've cracked more than a safe, too. I cracked a head about three months ago. If these funny cops knew who I was, and knew what I know about myself, they'd be stagin' a celebration. Arrest me like a common guy on the street! Throw me into a cell like this, with a man like you! Some vag!"

"Think that you're the whole thing, don't you?" Jerry Tandon said sneeringly.

"I suppose you are, huh?"

"If I told you, you'd think so."

"Yeh? I don't want to listen to a lot of fairy tales," Alex declared.

He turned his back and walked to the door of the cell, where he tried to rattle the bars. He shrieked half a dozen times in the general direction of the jailer's office.

"They'll be comin' in here to tame you down some if you don't stop that," Jerry Tandon told him.

"Yeh? Let 'em! I'm not afraid of the whole gang of 'em!" Alex informed him. "Let 'em come, from the big chief down to the janitor. This is enough to make a fightin' demon of a man."

"Aw, cool down," Jerry begged.

"Who's goin' to make me?" Alex demanded. "A man like me to be pinched for refusin' to move on! And put into a cell with a common bum!"

"I'm about fed up with that common-bum talk," Jerry Tandon told him.

"Yeh? Go ahead and get fed up!" Alex walked back to the bunk and sat down upon the end of it. "A little feller like you can't understand. What are you—a sneak thief?"

Jerry Tandon's eyes glowed. "I think not!" he said.

"No? Don't tell me. Just a common vag—that's what you are. Never turned a real trick in your life. And if you ever tried it you'd be caught in ten seconds!"

"Yeh? Let me tell you somethin', bo! If the cops knew what I know about me, I'd be havin' a little private cell, too, and maybe an armed guard in front of it."

Alex indulged in a gale of laughter. "You?" he gasped out. "You? Huh! Pickin' a pocket is about your limit. Maybe you're a moll buzzer!"

"That's enough," Jerry snapped out. "Moll buzzer, huh? Dip? Me? Huh! If you only knew."

"Gosh, you can't even make up a story," Alex told him.

Jerry Tandon felt anger surge within him. He glanced down the long, empty corridor. Nobody else in the big room. The cell stood more than fifteen

feet from the nearest wall, and that wall was of solid steel and cement. It was a safe place in which to boast. And he could boast to this one man. If he ever told, Jerry could give him the lie, laugh it off.

"You listen to me," he said fiercely, "and maybe you won't think that you're the only big fish in the pond. Hear about the robbery of the National Theater and the killin' of the watchman?"

"Yeh, I heard about it. But what's that got to do with a bum like you?" Alex demanded.

"I did it—that's all!"

"Don't make me laugh."

"I did it, I tell you. I tapped the box for about three thou, and when I was makin' a get-away that old watchman stopped me with a gun. I let him have it with a knife. And then I went right on with my get-away. And I've covered up. They had me on the carpet, and I fooled 'em. I had an alibi."

"Tell it to some kid," Alex scoffed. "You can't make me believe that. It was too good a job for a common rat like you."

"Common rat, am I?" Jerry answered snarlingly. "It's a bigger job than you ever pulled off, I bet."

"Yeh, if you pulled it off!"

"I did it, I tell you. I've got the three thou soaked away in a safe place. I'm here right now because the dicks are sore they can't fasten it on me. They'll give me a few months for bein' a vag, maybe. And when I get out I'll have the three thou and the laugh on the dicks."

"If I thought that you was tellin' the truth, I'd shake hands," Alex told him. "But I reckon that you're lyin'."

"Go right ahead and think so, if you want to," Jerry said. "But it's the truth. Who's the common bum now? You never turned a trick as big as that, I'll bet. You're a bluff!"

"You ain't convinced me any."

"Huh! It didn't bother me, either," Jerry Tandon went on. "I tossed the rubber gloves away and got out an alley window. I took plenty of time to clean my knife. Didn't bother me at all. I offered to split with the old fool, but he wouldn't. Maybe he wishes now that he had!"

"If you're tellin' the truth, you sure made monkeys out of the dicks," Alex said with some degree of admiration. "Dang these cops, anyway. Puttin' men like us in a detention cell like a couple of drunk hobos."

Alex got up and walked to the door again, and once more he rattled the bars and shrieked at the jailer. Then he paced the floor of the cell angrily. "I wish they'd get a move on," he said. "I want to get out of here. Let 'em fine me ten for refusin' to move on. Only I hope none of my friends ever hear of it."

"It's a good joke on the cops," Jerry said, feeling that now he stood on a par with the noted Alex. "Two men badly wanted are right here in their own little jail, and they don't know it. All cops-ers are fools!"

The door at the end of the corridor was opened suddenly, and the jailer and another officer came in. They hurried up to the cell door.

"Come along, you," the jailer said to Alex. "Into the night court for yours."

Alex turned for a moment and winked at Jerry Tandon. Then he went out with them, still berating the police. The corridor door was closed, and Jerry Tandon was left alone again.

CHAPTER VI.

TRAPPED.

THROWING himself full length upon the bunk, Jerry Tandon puffed lazily at his cigarette and wondered how much the judge would fine Alex. At least, Jerry told himself, he had taught the noisy Alex that he was not the only

big man in the jail. It was just like some of those fellows to imagine that they were bad men, and that all others were softies.

Half an hour passed, and then the corridor door was opened again, and once more the jailer appeared. He unlocked the door of the cell and beckoned Jerry. "Come along, young man," he said.

Jerry supposed that he was being taken into the night court also, possibly to be accused of vagrancy. But the jailer turned him over to a detective, and the detective led him down another corridor and to a little room.

Almost immediately two other men entered the room, two detectives, one of whom was Walt Bryan.

"Well, Jerry, we've got you," Bryan said.

"What do you mean, you've got me?"

"For robbing the theater and killing that old watchman, Jerry," Bryan said. "It's your last trick."

"Still harpin' on that, are you?" Jerry Tandon answered snarlingly. "I told you I didn't know anything about that, and I don't."

"How about your little confession, Tandon?"

"What do you mean?"

"Didn't you tell a man in the detention cell that you robbed the theater and killed the watchman?" Bryan demanded.

So that was the way of it! Alex had run to the cops with the story. Well, it wouldn't do them any good! They had no evidence. And nobody had overheard what he told Alex.

Detective Walt Bryan opened the door, and Alex came into the room.

"What did he say?" Bryan demanded.

"Why, he boasted about robbin' the theater and killin' that old man," Alex declared. "He said that he got about three thousand dollars."

"Got anything to say to that?" Bryan demanded, facing Jerry again.

Jerry Tandon tried to laugh. "This

bird," he said, "started to braggin' to me what a great man he was. That's all that I know. I told him to shut up, but he kept on braggin'. And then I told him that maybe I was a bad man, too—that maybe I had robbed that theater. But I didn't say exactly that I had. I just wanted to shut him up."

"Don't lie to me!" Bryan commanded. "You came right out and confessed that you did that job."

"This is a frame!" Jerry said. "You can't hang it on me, just because some bum like this Alex tells a lot of lies. You ain't got any evidence!"

Detective Bryan turned to Alex and waved his hand, and then Alex did a peculiar thing. He went to the washstand in one corner of the room. First he removed a wig and a part of his eyebrows. Then he smeared cold cream on his face and wiped it with a towel, and when he turned around the lines were gone—the lines in his face that Jerry Tandon had seen in the gloom of the detention cell.

It had an effect on Jerry. He stared and gulped. He did not know that Detective Bryan was playing this little game to break him down.

"What's all this?" Jerry demanded.

"This gentleman is Mr. Alexander Pandel," Bryan told him. "He is a famous character actor. I called him in to help me, Tandon! He thought a great deal of that old watchman."

"We all thought a great deal of him," Alex said in a smooth, refined voice. "He was a lovable old man. And he was struck down by a cowardly cur—that old man who never had harmed a human being in his life. I am very glad, officer, if I have been instrumental in aiding you to capture the murderer."

The "prisoner" paused.

Jerry braced himself and snarled again. "What kind of a game is this?" he shrieked. "Think that all this play-actin' is goin' to bother me?"

"Tandon, you confessed to this man!"

"Yeh, he says that I did, and I say that I didn't. And so what are you goin' to do about it?" Jerry Tandon answered. "You can't frame me!"

"We're not trying to frame you," Bryan thundered. "But we've got the goods on you, and you're going to the electric chair! You're a killer, and there's only one end for you!"

"You can't do it on this man's talk," Jerry cried. "He lies, I tell you!"

"Yes? He says that you told him you got three thousand dollars from that robbery. How can you explain that statement? As a matter of fact, that is about the amount stolen. But it has not been published in the papers. Nobody knew it except the manager of the theater and the police. So how could you know? That's a little slip you made, Jerry."

"Yeh? I didn't tell him any such thing," Jerry screeched. "It's a part of the frame-up! But you can't work it!"

"Oh, we have other evidence," Detective Walt Bryan said, turning toward the door again.

He opened the door and beckoned some one in the hall. Two men entered. One of them held sheets of paper in his hand, and upon the sheets—typewriting.

"Read it!" Bryan commanded.

And then Jerry Tandon gripped the sides of the chair upon which he was sitting, while Detective Bryan regarded him coldly, his face inscrutable. For the man standing in the middle of the room read, word by word, the conversation that Jerry Tandon had had with Alex in the cell, the damning admissions, the confession!

"You see, Tandon, we've got you," Bryan said. "You always were a booster, and now you have boasted once too often. There was a dictograph in that cell, Tandon. The whole thing was a trap. That fight was a fake, making your arrest and detention possible. Then we sent this gentleman to your cell, and he did some good acting, and

so you had to boast! We've got you, Tandon!"

"I tell you I didn't," Tandon shrieked. "I never——"

"We've got you," Detective Bryan said again.

Jerry Tandon looked up and met the detective's eyes. He could bluff no longer. He shivered. A vision of the

electric chair came to him again, and he suddenly broke down and sobbed.

"I—I offered to split with him, but he wouldn't," Jerry Tandon said.

And then Detective Bryan placed the written confession before him, and Jerry Tandon signed. And then he was taken away, to the private cell to which he had felt his importance entitled him.

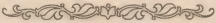
AMATEUR BURGLAR CAUGHT BY LOW TRICK

A NEW JERSEY man recently played a mean trick on a rookie burglar. It all came about as the result of two rings which the New Jersey man bought. Recently as a joke he took to wearing a very large diamond ring which cost him a quarter. Then he decided to buy a real ring and spent three hundred dollars on a high-quality stone.

The new ring was shown about, and eventually it brought a visitor to the New Jersey man's home. The uninvited visitor was rummaging in the next room to the owner's bedroom, and when the householder went to investigate, the intruder pointed a pistol at his head. "Hold your tongue. Give me that diamond ring you have, and there will be no more trouble," said the burglar.

"The ring," said the New Jersey man. "Oh, sure."

Then he got the quarter trinket which glittered brightly in a red-plush box. He offered it to the burglar, who grabbed it eagerly. Sliding the box into his pocket the thief disappeared down the stairs and out the front door. Later the burglary was reported to the police. This, of course, was only a formality. The owner said he'd just as leave they didn't catch the burglar—not after he tried to sell the ring, anyway.



TEN YEARS FOR RICH MOTORIST

A SHORT time ago Judge Audenreid of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, sentenced Harry G. Brock, millionaire and society leader, to six to ten years in the Eastern Penitentiary. Brock, a member of the brokerage firm of Sinkler & Brock, is the self-confessed murderer of an elderly woman, her son, and a girl. His sentence called for solitary confinement, but that form of imprisonment is no longer enforced. It is supposed that Brock will be given some clerical work in the prison.

Pale, but composed, Brock calmly pleaded "guilty" to a general charge of murder. He is the first automobilist in this country to be convicted of murder after such a crash. On the stand he said he had no recollection of the accident, which happened early in March. After he had been sentenced he was allowed to go home to bid farewell to his bed-ridden mother who did not know of her son's predicament. He told her he was sent up for only twelve months.

The three persons whose death Brock admitted he caused, were alighting from a street car, at the corner of Forty-fifth Street and Lancaster Avenue, Philadelphia, when Brock's new car, driven at high speed, hit them, threw the bodies more than one hundred feet, and sped away.

On the stand Brock testified he was unable to recall anything that happened on the night of the killings. He admitted drinking heavily, but would not admit he even knew the route he had traveled from St. Davids into the city.

The Glass Dagger

by Arthur Mallory

Author of "Black Valley," "A Dog's Trick," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

DOCTOR MONTGOMERY gives Nancy Fuller a ride in his silver, and Nancy shows him a gift which her uncle has brought her from Italy, a glass dagger. Later in the day Doctor Montgomery is called into the home of Peter Groshin to attend a man who has been injured, supposedly, in an automobile accident. Doctor Montgomery finds the man dead, and he discovers a glass splinter, resembling Nancy's glass dagger, imbedded in the flesh of the dead man. The body had been found beneath a wrecked car and taken to the Groshin residence by two unknown men who appear ill at ease and make their departure immediately upon the arrival of the doctor. Although these two men are suspected by Sheriff Lawlor as the murderers of the unidentified dead man, Doctor Montgomery cannot but feel that suspicion points very strongly toward the two young people, Nancy Fuller and her lover, Peter Groshin.

The two young men, suspected by Sheriff Lawlor as the murderers of John Doe, the unidentified man, are located and arrested. Evidence, however, begins to point away from these suspects, and they are released. Other disclosures begin once more to weave the web of suspicion about Nancy and Peter. Doctor Montgomery identifies, beyond any shadow of doubt, the crystal stiletto taken from John Doe's body, as the dagger gift given Nancy by her uncle.

CHAPTER X.

MR. SCHULTZE ARRIVES.

THE early mail next morning brought me a flat parcel by special delivery. Within was the promised photograph of Mr. Albert Marden, sent by the chief of police at Port Allegheny.

It was an ordinary cabinet photo, showing a heavy-faced man of middle age, square-jowled, wearing a sweeping dark mustache. It might have been our "John Doe" or another; I could not be sure. The mustache changed that pictured face amazingly. But, remembering that I had suspected "John Doe" of shaving off a mustache recently, I took the photo to Ollie Cornelius.

That dapper little man blinked his pink-rimmed eyes and ran an uncertain hand through his curly pompadour. He handled the picture gingerly, almost as afraid of it as he had been of "John Doe." Then he handed it back, pulled down his fancy vest, and spoke pompously.

"Can't be sure, doctor." He put one

hand on a hip and gestured daintily with the other. "Likely it's the same, but I couldn't say for sure."

An idea struck him, and he minced back to the shelves beside his dark room, where he kept the negatives of finished work. "I b'lieve I got a coupla prints here," he announced. "If I can find the full face I took of—of him," he announced, for he refused to name the dead man, even now, "likely I can retouch it, an' put a mustache in."

He found the print, laid it upon a high desk, and set absorbedly to work. There was a touch of the artist in Ollie Cornelius; he took a pride in his work. At last he swung about, triumphant.

"Look at here, doctor!" he said crowingly.

In one hand he held the photo sent from Port Allegheny; in the other, one of those he had taken of the dead man. This latter now showed the dead face marvelously changed; upon its upper lip a wide, flowing mustache had appeared, hiding the mouth and changing the whole expression.

There could no longer be any doubt. This was Albert Marden, of Port Allegheny, Pennsylvania. "John Doe" was identified at last. And, mindful of my promise, I phoned *The Star* office, in Buffalo, at once, and reported to Jim Newcomb.

He was sufficiently gratified by this bit of exclusive news, which came in ample time to appear in *The Evening Star's* first edition, but, as it happened, I had still more to offer him later in the day.

For a stranger stepped off the ten-fifteen train that morning; a lean, stooped, shrunken stranger, with watery eyes and a thin, straggling wisp of white mustache. He asked Jim Reed the way to my house, and old Verne Bookmiller, who happened to be at the depot, volunteered to guide him.

I was at the post office, waiting for the mail to be distributed; Verne spied me and led the stranger in.

The man looked me over cautiously, blinking his weak eyes, and presently introduced himself.

"My name is Schultze," he announced. "John G. Schultze, of Port Allegheny. I got your telegram last night." He spoke in a hoarse, catarrhal voice, very softly, glancing furtively about the while, as though he feared to be overheard.

"How do you do, Mr. Schultze?" said I. "I'm very glad you came. You were a friend of Mr. Albert Marden, I believe?"

"Was?" he repeated querulously. "He's dead, then, is he? You're sure this fellow you've got here is Marden?"

"Yes; quite sure. We got a photograph this morning."

Schultze emitted a queer sound, between a gasp and a groan. He came closer and gripped my arm with bony, clawed fingers. "Say, listen!" he whispered hoarsely, his watery eyes glancing all about. "He had a lot of money on

him, didn't he? All bunk, that in the papers about him being robbed, huh?"

I shook my head, freeing my arm from his grip, and stepped back. I was not greatly taken with Mr. John G. Schultze. "I'm sorry," I told him rather coldly, "but the papers were quite right. He was robbed; at least, we suppose he must have been. There wasn't a penny on him."

Schultze glared at me, his lean hands working. But presently he seemed to decide that I was telling the truth. He emitted another sound; unmistakably a groan, this time. Plainly the robbery upset him more than the murder.

"Well, well," he sighed. "It can't be helped, I suppose. You got all his things, doctor? His clothes, and his car, and baggage? I—I'd like to look 'em over for myself."

"Don't you want to see *him*?" I asked rather disgustedly.

"Him? Huh! Oh, huh! Yes, I suppose so. Yes, yes—huh! Of course." He had a hacking, catarrhal cough which continually interrupted his hoarse speech. "Yes, I better see him, too."

I led the way to Archie Jackson's, where the stranger's body had been kept, properly embalmed, in the hope of locating relatives.

"Were you related to Mr. Marden?" I asked my companion.

"Huh? Related? Oh, no. Huh! Not that. We were—in business—huh! Partners, as you might say."

"Indeed? What was his business?"

I asked merely to make conversation, and, perhaps, to confirm my deduction that Marden had been a steel worker. But Mr. Schultze seemed to take the question in bad part.

He stopped short and gave me that suspicious, intent stare again. "Huh? What business? Oh, why—importing. Yes, of course!" And he chuckled dryly. "Importing."

"Oh," I commented. It was rather a vague reply, I thought; but it was

none of my business, of course. "Marden used to be a steel worker, didn't he?" I inquired.

Schultze stared again, still suspiciously. "How'd yuh know?" he grumbled; and coughed that irritating cough.

"Found coal dust and steel splinters in his ear wax," I said briefly.

He continued to stare at me without comprehension.

"I knew from that," I explained, "that he must have worked in some foundry or machine shop or something of the kind. That's how we identified him, finally. Pittsburgh is the nearest steel center; so I sent a telegram to the chief of police there, and later to the chief at Port Allegheny."

Schultze scowled blackly. "Chief of police, huh?" he muttered. "What for?"

"Why, to find out if such a man was missing, naturally. I knew he hadn't worked at his trade for a long time; it wouldn't have done any good to inquire of the various steel mills and so on."

"You knew he hadn't worked, huh? Looks to me as if you knew a whole lot about Marden," growlingly replied Schultze, more suspicious than ever. "What you been snooping and prying for, anyhow?"

I looked at him. "I don't like your manner, Mr. Schultze," I said crisply. "I've been trying to identify a murdered man; and to find out who killed him. Do you know anything about that?"

He blinked at this pointed question. His watery eyes evaded mine; beneath his wispy mustache the thin lips worked uneasily, showing crooked, yellow teeth.

"You'll have to excuse me, doctor," he mumbled apologetically. "I'm all worked up about this. I—I didn't mean to make you mad."

"Humph!" said I. "Here we are. Mr. Jackson, our undertaker, is keeping the body in here."

Mr. Schultze followed me in. He

scarcely glanced at the body. After one cursory look he nodded sullenly. "Yes; that's him all right." His lips worked viciously. "Dirty sneak! Shaved off his mustache, huh? I knew he was trying to double cross me!"

He showed no more interest in his dead friend, but asked to see the clothes and belongings which I had saved. He went through everything with meticulous care, searching every pocket, feeling linings, coat lapels, trouser cuffs, as though he expected to find some secret pocket.

When at last he had finished, Mr. Schultze looked up at me, his lean, colorless face twisted with rage and disappointment.

"He's clean, all right—darn him!" he muttered. "I'd just like to know if he *was* robbed, or if he hid out on me. Why, that fellow's worse'n a high-jacker! Look how he cut off all the labels from his clothes and shaved his mustache and everything. Trying to make a get-away, that's what he was—and left me to hold the bag!"

"I think, Mr. Schultze," I began slowly. "that it's time you explained a little. You haven't told me anything yet. What is your interest in this man Marden? And why do you think he double crossed you?"

He stroked his receding chin reflectively, his little, watery eyes taking me in in furtive, darting glances. At last he said, "I—well, perhaps I ought. But I've got to talk to you alone, first!"

His caution seemed rather excessive, for a law-abiding citizen. And suddenly Jim Newcomb's guess as to the source of this Albert Marden's wealth flashed through my mind. Jim had been right, I fancied; this man Schultze looked like a criminal, certainly.

"All right," I told him. "You can come over to the office if you want to."

I took him home with me rather reluctantly. I was anxious to get rid of Mr. John G. Schultze as quickly as possible. I did not care for his com-

pany; moreover, I wanted to see Nancy Fuller at once. This time, I told myself grimly, neither tears nor anger should drive me away. Nancy must speak, and that to the point!

In my private office, with the door tight shut, Mr. Schultze began to talk. His furtive eyes drifted here and there; even here, he seemed to fear eavesdroppers. I could scarcely hear his husky, catarrhal voice.

"Like I told you, doctor, Al Marden and I were in the importing business together. We were making a good thing out of it, too, until——"

"Importing?" I interrupted. "Importing what?"

"Liquor," said Schultze, with an insinuating leer at my ignorance. "Whisky, brandy, gin. Ran it in from Canada. Good stuff, too, all of it. None of your moonshine and wood alcohol."

"Humph!" said I rather disgustedly. "You were bootleggers."

Schultze looked injured. "We-ell, I suppose some folks would call it that. We did a high-class business, though; nothing less'n ten-case lots, and everybody satisfied. Long as important people—judges, and congressmen, and millionaires are bound to have liquor, somebody's got to get it for 'em, haven't they? Well!"

"Well," said I, "I didn't write the eighteenth amendment. You needn't make a stump speech about it." I took no great pains to be civil, for we in Black Valley had had too recent an object lesson of the evils of bootleg liquor. "Get to it; how about Marden?"

I asked this sharply.

He gave me a reproachful glance. "Al had some money," he explained. "Made good pay all though the war, and after; steel puddlers do, you know. I had the connections; and we went in together, running liquor down from Canada, like I said. We made good, too. Stuck to the high-class trade, and treated everybody honest, and things went along fine

until here lately. Then these enforcement agents got interfering. They sent a 'flying squad,' as they call 'em, out from Washington." He paused, with a grimace of rage and fear.

"I'm out on bail right now," he confessed in a hoarse whisper. "Well, Al Marden had just left town when I got the tip. Started off in his new auto. We planned for a big shipment; the biggest we ever made. Al was to slip off for a 'vacation.' We gave it out he was going to California. Instead, he was to run up to Toronto and fix up this shipment himself. We wouldn't trust anybody else. Al carried seventy-five grand—all our capital."

Schultze paused again. I was weary of his hoarse half whisper, continually broken by that hacking, catarrhal cough. "Go on; get to the point," I advised him irritably. "Marden left Port Allegheny with seventy-five thousand dollars; then what?"

"That's all," replied Schultze sadly. "Next day I got the tip that dry agents were on the way from Washington, and I sent word to Buffalo, where Marden was to stop off. He never got it; and the next I heard was your wire about his being murdered here."

"What makes you think he'd double crossed you?"

"What else could I think?" the man answered snarlingly. "He shaves off his mustache and cuts his name out of his underclothes, even. He was beating it with our money—my money!"

"Maybe he was," I conceded. "He'd taken the license plates off his car, anyhow, and even chiseled the engine number off."

"You see?" Schultze hissed the words in suppressed fury. "Sneaking double crosser! Glad he was croaked!"

"He might have been hiding from the prohibition men," I suggested.

But Schultze swept this aside. "He never even knew they were after us. No, sir! He robbed me, that's what.

And then somebody got him, and got him good. Glad of it!"

That brought me back to what was, after all, the important factor. "Any idea who killed him?" I demanded.

The other shook his head. "If I did I'd buy him a cigar!"

"Did anybody else know about this money?" I persisted. "Anybody but you? Could any one have followed him from Port Allegheny to rob him?"

"Not a soul! Nobody in the world but him and me knew he was going. Ral—er, that is, the men at the other end, thought we'd send the money by express, like we had before."

I sat back and eyed him keenly. His lean, shrunken figure, his ratlike face, with its wisp of dirty-white mustache hanging over a receding chin, his watery, blinking eyes—his whole appearance inspired distrust and suspicion. This fellow, I decided, was quite capable of murdering his partner, if it could have been done without danger to himself.

"Did it surprise you to hear that Marden was dead?" I asked him deliberately.

Schultze gaped at me for a moment, blinking his rheumy eyes. His pallid face grew paler; his thin lips worked nervously.

"Why not?" he said presently. Then, "What you getting at, huh? You think I bumped him off? Why, time Al Marden was croaked I was chasing about Pittsburgh trying to scrape up my bail!" He laughed without mirth. "Oh, I can prove an alibi, all right—if that's what you mean."

I shrugged. No doubt he was right. After all, if he had procured the murder of his partner, he would not have come to Black Valley to-day. He would have been traveling in the other direction with his "seventy-five grand," I presumed.

"Well, then," I said, rising, "I guess that's all. By the way, do you want Marden's body shipped home for burial?"

Schultze snarled. "Let him rot!" he replied coarsely. "I'm done with the fellow."

"I did not try to hide my disgust. Hasn't he any family or any decent friends?"

This only provoked a callous, crooked grin. "Nope! Bachelor, Al was. And he hadn't any friends but me, far as I know."

"Deliver me from such a friend!" said I aloud, and threw open the office door. "I won't detain you any longer, Mr. Schultze."

But the fellow was not to be rebuffed. He came closer and gripped my arm with bony, clawlike fingers. His straggling mustache brushed my ear as he whispered:

"Say, doc! Listen. If you catch 'em, whoever killed Marden, and robbed him, you'll remember me, won't you? That seventy-five grand's mine. All of it, by rights!"

I pushed him away. "If we find any money the courts will have to decide who it belongs to."

At that he snarled silently and went away. And I resolved that if any money were found I would do my best to keep it out of the clutches of Mr. John G. Schultze.

CHAPTER XI.

NANCY FULLER'S STORY.

BEFORE I could get rid of the man Schultze, it was nearly noon. But I would not wait for dinner; I was too uneasy to eat. Though I had worked so hard to establish it, the final identification of John Doe gave me little satisfaction. My mind was taken up entirely with other matters.

A long and damning array of clues pointed straight toward Nancy Fuller and Peter Groshin, her lover; and now, Peter's sudden flight, followed by the proof that the splinter of glass which had killed Albert Marden was really

the nicked, defaced blade of Nancy's glass stiletto, drove me to final action.

I stopped only to phone the offices of *The Buffalo Evening Star*, and to add to this morning's bare identification of the murdered man as Albert Marden, the substance of Schultze's story. Jim Newcomb heard me through, interrupting now and then to ask some question, or to voice his profane delight at this scoop. I could hear the scratch and thumping of his busy pencil as he scrawled notes of what I said.

But his enthusiastic compliments left me cold. I was shaken by a chill fear that to-day I might be forced to unearth a still more startling story for *The Star*—and one whose publication I dreaded.

And so, as the twelve o'clock whistles blew, I climbed into my flivver and drove out along the Savage Road. Sickening fears dragged at me; but a stubborn determination drove me on. Now, at last, I would have the truth from Nancy Fuller, mauger her feminine evasions or her red-headed wrath!

Fast as I drove, my fears rode with me, weighing me down. And I drove fast; so fast that those I met stopped to stare after me, and heads appeared in farmhouse windows. Folk wondered, no doubt, who had been hurt, that I hurried so, never pausing to wave a greeting. And, after all, life and death hung on my going, perhaps.

When I reached the Four Corners and stopped before the Fuller house my radiator was boiling merrily. As before, Nancy sat on the front porch, fresh and cool in white muslin, though the day was hot. She looked up and waved at me, then rose and came toward me, smiling.

"Come in, Doctor Monty," she urged, giving me a slim, cordial hand. "You look hot and tired; better sit down in the shade for a minute. You'll stay for dinner, won't you? We've just finished, but I can fix you up something in a

jiffy. I'll call father. He hasn't gone back to work yet; he'll be so glad to see you!"

She dragged out a roomy, comfortable wicker chair for me and set it in the shade of the vines which overran the porch. Then she brought a great pitcher of lemonade, all beaded with cold moisture, and offered me to drink, chatting all the while in sweet friendliness. Her gray eyes met mine as frankly as though nothing lay hidden between us; it was hard to question the open innocence of her manner.

But I had a thing to do, distasteful as it was. "No, thanks," I told her. "I don't want anything to eat. And you needn't call your father. I came to see you."

"To see me?" she repeated, innocent eyes wide open. "Why, how nice of you! Another glass of lemonade? No? Well, sit down, and let's talk."

She made a brave showing; but I saw now that her calm was a trifle uncertain. Her gray eyes avoided mine; her slender white hands twisted nervously at her handkerchief.

I felt extremely sorry for her.

"Did—did you have anything special to tell me?" she asked. Her red lips trembled. She was very pretty thus; the wistful appeal of her manner became her vastly.

"Something to ask you, at least," I corrected rather grimly. "And I want you to tell me the truth, this time!"

"I've never lied to you, doctor," she told me steadily, her proud little head held high.

"It amounts to the same thing. You certainly didn't tell me all you knew."

"About what?"

"About Albert Marden. About the man who gave you a lift in his roadster last Tuesday; the man who was murdered right after that, and loaded into that old rebuilt car and sent over the bank on the side of West Hill, between here and Groshins."

"Well?" she asked hardily. But her face was white to the lips.

"Well! It's time to speak out, Nancy. I've found out too much already; it'll only make things worse if you don't." I struck my hands together in exasperation. "You and Peter have made a fine mess, between you," I accused sternly. "If you'd only spoken out at the very first, it could have been arranged somehow, I'm sure. Self-defense, or something like that; no jury'd ever have convicted you—not in Black Valley! But instead, you had to deny things, and wiggle, and lie—yes, you did lie, Nancy Fuller! Not in words, maybe, but it was lying to keep quiet. And now, to cap it all, Peter has to run away without a word——"

"He has *not*!" Nancy sprang to her feet and faced me, eyes blazing. "Peter hasn't run away. He—he had to go in to Buffalo, because——" And she stopped short. "But that's a secret."

"Buffalo!" I repeated. "That's what he told me. But he didn't go to Buffalo. He took the five-twenty-five and went right on through Cuba—on to Coal City, and farther, for all I know."

Nancy stared at me, her pale lips parted. Plainly this was news. "Are—are you sure?" she faltered.

"I am. I tried to get him on the phone at Cuba. I wanted to ask him the same questions I'm going to ask you."

The girl sat down abruptly, as though her knees had failed. "He must have had other news," she protested loyally. "He had some good reason for changing his mind, I know he did!"

Other news, I reflected. Doubtless he had; news of my investigations. Had he learned, perhaps, that he had been seen driving that rebuilt flivver; the murder car?

"Nancy," said I abruptly. "Nancy! Didn't Peter have a talk with Salvator Rosa yesterday?"

"What of it? Yes, he did. Peter was over here, looking for some young

stock that strayed up the road, and Mr. Rosa came by with that ridiculous old horse he drives. I remember now; he stopped, and Peter went out to the wagon, and they talked for a minute. What difference does that make?"

I did not explain. "And right after that Peter told you he'd have to go in to—Buffalo?" I guessed.

Nancy nodded. "But he'd been planning to go for several days," she insisted.

So that was it! Salvator Rosa had given the warning, innocently enough, I made sure, for Salvator was an honest soul. But he was simple-minded, and Peter could have wormed his secret from him easily enough. And then, knowing he had been seen in that rebuilt car, Peter Groshin had fled at once, deceiving even his sweetheart as to his destination.

"You'd better tell me all you know, Nancy," I warned her soberly. "Things are bad enough now; don't make them worse by deceiving me any longer. This man that was murdered—Albert Marden was his name—he came by just after you left me, there at Nagle's. And he stopped and asked you to ride; and you did."

Watching me breathlessly, Nancy nodded.

"And then he got fresh," I guessed. "He insulted you, didn't he? It happened right near where the Ridge Road turns off; and Peter Groshin was there mending fence; and he saw you?"

Nancy nodded again, and wet dry lips. "H-how did you know?" she whispered faintly.

"There was a fight, then," I persisted pitilessly. "Peter came running; and he hit this fellow Marden in the eye, didn't he? And you struck at him with the glass dagger?"

Nancy's lips moved, but no sound came from them. Her wide, gray eyes never left mine; I saw that she was beginning to tremble.

"There was a struggle, then, between the three of you. Now, listen, Nancy, and answer carefully; tell me the truth! Which one of you stabbed him? Which drove that glass dagger through his heart, and broke it off? Was it Peter Groshin—or was it *you*?"

"I—I——" mumbled Nancy indistinctly. "I—you——" Then, suddenly, her momentary paralysis seemed to leave her. She straightened, and drew a deep breath. "So *that's* what you've been thinking? I was afraid of it; I told Peter if anything at all came out, folks would think just that. But he made me promise not to say a word; he didn't want me mixed up in it at all."

My breath came easier; of a sudden my heart was light again. I could have shouted. Nancy Fuller was innocent, surely! Though she had not yet denied the crime in so many words, I knew she was innocent.

"I'll tell you just what did happen," she went on presently. "It was almost exactly as you thought—except only the last. This—this stranger—Marden, was that his name. He did ask me to ride, and he was awfully—impudent. I got angry; and I think I had a right, too! He just laughed at me; he was a big man, you know, and awfully strong. And he slowed up and stopped right there by the forks of the Ridge Road, and grinned at me just horribly. And he said, '*Now* I'll attend to you, young lady!' I was frightened sick."

She paused to draw a long breath; she was shaking a little at the thought of that remembered terror. "Peter was right close by," she went on, "mending fence. I didn't see him at first, and neither did that—that man, or he'd never have *dared*! Well, anyway, I screamed out, just as loud as ever I could; and Peter heard me and shouted and came running. I was never as glad to see anybody in all my life! He came straight on, jumped onto the running board, and hit that man with all his might, right in

the face—under his eye, it was. I can see him now!"

She stopped once more. "Go on," I urged. "And then?"

"Then this stranger, this—Marden, did you say? Well, he fell back in the seat, kind of, and didn't move. 'Oh, Peter!' I said. 'You—you've killed him.' But Peter laughed a little; it made me shiver to hear him. I—I didn't know he could get as angry as he was. And, 'No such luck,' he said. He scowled at this man, lying back there, all white and still. 'I wish I *had* killed him,' he said. 'Maybe I will, yet!' Well, of course I knew he didn't mean it. So I climbed down out of the car and told Peter to come along. And we started down the road, walking toward the Groshins, and left this fellow there in his roadster, unconscious."

"But the dagger?" I asked then. "That glass stiletto?"

"I was coming to that. I had it in my lap, there in the car. And when he—that man—grabbed hold of me, he must have hit it; or else, maybe, Peter did it when he struck the man. Anyway, when we were walking down the road I thought of the dagger, and unwrapped it. And the blade was gone! There wasn't anything left but the hilt. I suppose the blade dropped in the road, or somewhere; it was all in pieces, probably, being so brittle. I didn't care; I meant to have it cut off, anyway. And the hilt wasn't hurt at all; it broke as clean as if it had been cut."

"Probably made to do that," said I absently. "I've read that they marked such daggers with a diamond, so they'd break at the right place. So you and Peter went right on home, then?"

"Why, yes. That is, I did. But when I unwrapped the dagger and saw the blade was gone, Peter stopped and said he'd go back. He said he'd look for it, and, besides, he wanted to see if that man was badly hurt. He'd cooled down by then, I guess, and was afraid maybe

he had killed the man, or hurt him badly. So Peter went back alone, and I went on home."

She stopped, and we sat in silence for a moment. I was thinking fast. This time Miss Nancy had told the whole truth, as she knew it; of that I was sure. She was innocent of Albert Marden's death. But Peter? He had gone back—alone. He had said, "I wish he were dead; maybe I'll kill him yet!" What had Peter Groshin done?

"How soon did Peter turn back?" I asked.

"Why, not for quite a while. We were nearly to his house before I noticed the stiletto; and we didn't walk very fast." A delicate color rose in her fair cheeks.

I could readily believe they had walked slowly. Had not Peter Groshin just rescued his best beloved from the clutches of a villain, in the most approved fashion? He would have been more—or less—than human if he had not taken time to bask in his sweetheart's admiration.

"Half an hour?" I guessed. I hoped it might be so long; that would account for Peter almost up to the time I arrived.

"Nun-no," replied Nancy. "Not that long, surely! It's only about half a mile, you know. I'm sure it wasn't more than fifteen minutes, anyway. I know it was quite a while after I got to Groshins before those men brought him—it—the body, I mean, into the house."

"Before you got there? Wasn't Peter with you?"

"Why, no. I told you; he went back to look for my stiletto blade. He didn't get home till after those men came. You were just coming down the hill when he got in the back door. I saw you."

I groaned aloud. "He was gone all that time? Sure?" I asked.

"Of course I am." Nancy was innocently surprised at my gravity. "Why do you look at me like that, doctor?"

"Did you know Peter had bought a car?" I asked, with seeming irrelevance.

Nancy nodded. "I know he talked of it. He was up here, that same morning, with an old rattletrap, mother said. I didn't see it. But he told me he was going to get a secondhand car if he could, for his mother's birthday. It was to be a surprise; I didn't know he'd told anybody—but me."

"How did he plan to hide it?" I persisted. "He couldn't take it home without her knowing."

"Why, the very first of those tumble-down old shacks in Lost Nation has a barn behind it, you know. It's a tiny place, but Peter told me it was weather-proof; the Groshins used it to store things sometimes. He was going to keep his auto there, if he got one. It would be perfectly safe; nobody ever goes through the Lost Nation. But I didn't know he'd really bought a car yet. Are you sure?"

"Not quite sure," I admitted. "And, anyhow, he hasn't had any use of it since that day, if he did. Oh, Nancy, child! I'm very much afraid your Peter had good reasons for running away!"

"He hasn't run away," repeated the girl stubbornly. "Why should he? My Peter hasn't done anything wrong!"

Even now it was evident that she had no suspicion of her lover. It had not so much as occurred to her that there was anything strange about his return to that stalled car, or about his long absence. Such sublime confidence touched me.

Wherefore I kept silence. But to me what had happened seemed plain enough. Peter had hurried back to the stunned stranger, his heart full of such bitter, tenacious wrath, no doubt, as had driven his ancestor, Francois Grosjean, half across the world.

Hurrying back, Peter had found the stranger still senseless, perhaps; or he had roused, and the two fought again.

And Peter had snatched up the blade of that glass dagger from where it lay on the seat or the floor of the roadster, and had struck home. It must have been so; had I not drawn that very splinter of glass from Albert Marden's heart?

Yes, it was all plain enough. The rebuilt car, hidden in a barn in Lost Nation, only a few hundred yards away, would serve, perhaps, to conceal his crime. Peter had driven the roadster out through Hardscrabble; had abandoned it there, fearing, no doubt, that his victim might be traced by the car; had hurried back at a panting run for his own car, just bought. It was then, probably, that Jerry Lapham had seen him.

Back, then, in the ancient rebuilt car; the dead man lifted into it, Peter had let it plunge, unguided, over the shoulder of the hill. And then, still running, stumbling, panting, in hot haste back through the meadows to his home, to arrive just as I came into sight; and as those two passers-by had carried the dead man into his own front door.

What a shock that must have been—to be pursued thus by the victim of his own black rage! No wonder I had thought him pale and anxious! No wonder he had been shaken and upset.

Nancy broke the long silence. "So now," said she happily, "everything is all right again, isn't it? I wanted to tell it all right away, but Peter wouldn't let me. He said he wasn't going to have my name dragged into such a thing, and have reporters out here bothering, and my picture in the papers, like as not, labeled, 'The Woman in the Case.' And so I kept quiet, to please him. You didn't really think I killed that man, did you, Doctor Monty?"

She glowed with innocent happiness and relief to have this troublesome secret off her mind. Try as I would, I could not match her light, jesting tone. But I strove to smile.

"Not really," I told her. "But you've got quite a temper, you know. And—I found the missing blade of your glass stiletto."

"You did?" She leaned forward eagerly, quite pleased. Then some premonition came to her, for her face fell, "You did?" she repeated uncertainly. "Wh-where?"

"In Albert Marden's heart!"

"Oh-h!" said Nancy, very softly. I could have bitten my tongue out. Why had I told her? Poor child! Why could I not have left her her pathetic faith in Peter Groshin? But it was out now.

"Doctor!" said Nancy pitifully. Her lips were stiff and unmanageable. "Monty—dear! You don't mean—you don't think—— Oh, Peter!"

"What made him run away, then?" I asked miserably. It was all I could think of to say.

Nancy rose. She was very white, but calm. "He'll come back!" said she superbly. "My Peter will come back and explain everything. Oh, I know what you think; and I can't blame you—much. But you don't know him as I do. He'll come back pretty soon, and he'll explain everything. I *know* he will! Because, you see, I know Peter."

"I hope you're right, my dear," I mumbled. "And—and try to forgive me, will you?"

There seemed nothing more to say. I had done mischief enough for the time being. I choked out some sort of farewell and stumbled down the steps and out to my waiting car, feeling about as cheerful as though I had just been caught robbing a baby's bank. And Nancy stood and watched me go, very straight and still, a pitiful, proud smile upon her white lips.

I drove toward home, suddenly conscious that I was very hungry, and very old and forlorn. And as I went I abused myself for being a tactless, brutal blunderer, and no detective at all.

CHAPTER XII.

IN CANNERY TOWN.

DESPITE Nancy's implicit confidence in her lover, I could not convince myself of his innocence. Now I realized that I should have stopped him, by force, if necessary. I ought never to have allowed him to take the five-twenty-five; I should have realized that his going was flight, and a confession of complicity, at least, in Marden's killing.

But Peter was gone, and all that I could do now was to put my facts before the sheriff and make him in law, as already in fact, a fugitive from justice. So much I must do at once, I decided; wherefore I drove on past Maple Street, toward the post office and Bill Shattuck's office. Shattuck could issue a warrant.

So I drove past the Putnam House; and there, in the green-painted bench upon its porch, sat the man Schultze. Plainly he intended to stay in Black Valley as long as any hope remained of recapturing his "seventy-five grand." Beside him, but at the extreme farther end of the bench, sat old Verne Bookmiller, a comical expression of disgust upon his face. I judge that Verne had been talking with the bootlegger, and had liked him no better than I did.

"Hey, doc!" called Verne, in the high, carrying voice of one long used to calling distant cows. "Hey, Monty! This here feller claims he's been robbed. You ain't got seventy-five thousand dollars of hisen, have you?"

I grinned, and Mr. Schultze looked very uncomfortable.

"He claims some of us hicks've got it," Verne went on remorselessly. "I do' know but what we'd all best let him search us. He might git us arrested, 'r somepin, if we don't. He's a terrible important feller, he is, accordin' to his own tell."

Schultze rose and went hastily into

the hotel, his pale, watery eyes venomous. But I stopped my car, and sat there, thinking fast. Verne's heavy-handed jesting reminded me of the one ray of light which shone into my dark problem.

The man Marden had been robbed! Now, Peter Groshin might well have killed him, given the provocation which my talk with Nancy had suggested. But surely the boy would not have robbed him afterward! And robbed he had been, even though, as Schultze suspected, he had hidden his seventy-five thousand dollars before setting out. He would not have undertaken a long auto trip without some money, without papers, watch, penknife, without cuff links and shirtstuds, even.

I sat still in my car and thought on, ignoring Verne Bookmiller's shouted questions. Even though Peter had killed this man, some one else had robbed him. Granting so much, who could it have been? Not the two young men Sheriff Lawlor had had brought back from Batavia, surely; their story was too easily checked. They would not have had time to search Marden so thoroughly, even had they been so minded. And they were honest boys, their associates declared.

Well, then; some unknown person or persons had been at the scene of the murder. And, since we knew well that no other motor cars had passed that way, they must have been on foot. The abandoned roadster, the wrecked rebuilt flivver, the touring car which had brought Marden's body to Groshins, and my own flivver—these were all the automobiles which had passed the murder spot on Tuesday afternoon. Now, if these unknown persons had been on foot, they could not well have gone very far before the crime was discovered. But no suspicious strangers had been seen in or about Black Valley that day; so I was forced to believe that the robbers of Marden's body were men known here.

This was a slender thread of reasoning, I admit. But to me, who dreaded such an act anyway, it seemed enough to justify me in delay. I decided to wait. I would not report to the sheriff just yet; I would not set the machinery of the law at work to find Peter Groshin, capture him, and return him to Black Valley town as a murderer. For, I reasoned, if other men had robbed Albert Marden, perhaps they had murdered him, also, and Peter was quite innocent. It would be wicked, then, to accuse him unjustly.

I was very wrong, I suppose. I should have gone straight to Sheriff Lawlor, laid my information before him, and let him act as he chose. I was very near to being an accessory after the fact, if Peter Groshin were guilty. But I knew Peter, and liked him; and I knew Nancy Fuller, and liked her even more. And my sympathies conquered my judgment. I admit it; I am no Spartan—or was it a Roman?—to condemn my own folk to death.

Peter's case must wait, then. In the meantime I had another thing to do. That ancient motor car, the rebuilt machine, had not materialized itself out of thin air. It must have come from somewhere; whence, I resolved to find out, if I could. It might be that Peter had not bought it after all; Salvator Rosa had seen him driving it down through Crab Hollow, toward Cannery Town. Perhaps he had left it there.

But first I must eat. I was well-nigh famished, for by now it was two o'clock, and I had had nothing since breakfast. I started the motor of my flivver again, intending to back and turn it toward home.

Then Verne Bookmiller descended the hotel steps and came out into the road. "Say, doc!" he began, setting a substantial foot upon my running board. "Say, doc! You gone to sleep, or somepin? I been tryin' to talk to you f'r ten minutes."

"Sorry," I apologized. "I was thinking. I'm feeling upset, Verne."

The stout old gentleman eyed me shrewdly. "About this here murder, hey?" he guessed. "Say, doc! Know what made Peter Groshin up an' leave town in such a hurry, las' night?"

I shook my head. I was not ready to share my suspicions, even with Verne Bookmiller.

"We-ell," he went on, "you needn't tell me, 'less you got a mind to. But, say! John Albert Morris was up to my place this mornin'; Mis' Tulliver sent him t' borrow a dozen aigs, like she does; an' he told me a funny yarn, kinda."

John Albert Morris was fifth—or sixth; I could never keep count of the numerous progeny of Mr. Vincent St. John Tulliver, deceased. He and his family constituted Black Valley's submerged tenth; but Vincent St. John had been killed a year ago, by John Jasper, before that scoundrel's well-earned fate overtook him. Since, as before, Mrs. Tulliver and her flock had subsisted upon contributions offered by, and levied upon, charitable neighbors. They lived in a tumble-down shack in Crab Hollow.

"What did John Albert Morris have to say?" All the Tulliver children had triple names, and insisted on being called by them in full.

"We-ell," droned Verne, "he claims he seen that rebuilt car, the one this feller Marden was killed in."

"He does?" said I. Here was news! "Uh-huh. Come past Tullivers, he says, twicet, las' Tuesday." Verne paused. "Pete Groshin was drivin', John Albert says. He came up f'om Cannery Town way, an' 'en came back again, 'bout half a hour or so after."

I pondered. As I may have said, a steep, stony road, hardly more than a track, ran from the Savage Road down through narrow, rocky Crab Hollow to the flats, meeting the Creek Road right by Cannery Town.

"Is he sure it was the same car?" I asked.

"Uh-huh. Seems he was up there when Hank Sutton went after that smashed auto. Jus' like a kid; into ever'thing. He looked her over good, he says, an' he knows it's the same one."

"I see. And he's sure Peter was going back toward the flats the second time?"

"Uh-huh. But John Albert, he claims he seen the same auto oncet more, that same day. Comin' up the hill, that time, f'om Cannery Town way. He didn't get a good look, bein' out back o' his house, so's he can't be sure who was in it; but he thinks they was a coupla fellers. This was long about ha' pas' four or so; Tullivers ain't got no clocks, you know."

"Half past four," I repeated absently. "That couldn't have been Peter."

Yet, as I thought it over, why not? Peter had been, ostensibly, mending fence along the Savage Road. He was all alone; what hindered him from slipping down through the Hollow, on foot, and driving the car back? If he really planned to buy it as a surprise for his mother, he would have gone by stealth in some such way. At eight years, John Albert Morris' ideas of time were vague enough; Peter might have made such a trip, cached the old car in Lost Nation, and still have been back by the roadside when Marden came along. The boy thought there were two men in the car; but he had not seen plainly. And perhaps some one had accompanied Peter.

Verne Bookmiller watched my abstraction keenly. "You think Pete Groshin knows more'n he's told about this murder?" he half asked, half asserted.

I groaned. "I don't know, Verne."

"What'd the dang fool wanta skip like that for, anyways?" grumbled Verne. "If he was here we c'd jus' ask him about that auto an' find out where it come f'om."

"It came from Cannery Town," I declared. "It must have. Peter came from that way, driving it, and went back again. And Cannery Town's the only place in the three valleys you could keep a car like that overnight without everybody's knowing all about it."

Verne tugged at his square-cut beard. "Uh-huh," he admitted. "We ain't been keepin' tabs on that bunch like we'd oughta. We-ell, doc, if that old car came outa Cannery Town, the place to find out about it is down in Cannery Town, ain't it?"

That was logical, surely. "Wait, Verne," I offered impulsively. "Let me get some dinner; I'm about starved. Then we'll get hold of Phil Riley, and the three of us'll go down into Cannery Town and see what we can find out. How about it?"

"Sure!" agreed Verne.

But just then Jack Mack came down the street. "Hey, doc!" he called. "Been lookin' all over f'r you. Lafe Tanner's folks wants you to come over onto White Creek right away."

"All right; soon as I get something to eat, Jack," I promised, and turned to Verne. "That'll be twins, probably," I told him. "I can't get back before dark; maybe not before morning. Suppose we wait?"

"Sure!" repeated Verne amiably. "We c'n get Phil Riley an' go over to Cannery Town around ten o'clock to-morrow. Won't do no harm t' wait."

So it was arranged, and I went home for a hurried meal before my twelve-mile drive across the valley and over Cranberry Hill into the White Creek country.

As I had expected, it was long after midnight when I got home, and Black Valley Town was wrapped in slumber. As I drove up the Creek Road past Cannery Town, its scattered shacks and huts without a glimmer of light among them, looked peaceful and picturesque in the faint starlight. Nothing stirred,

save a pig or two which wandered restlessly between tumble-down dwellings, and one ill-tempered cur that pursued my car, yapping frenziedly for a quarter of a mile or more. By night, Cannery Town seemed innocuous enough, and more than ever poverty-stricken. It seemed impossible that any denizen of those shanties could have owned a motor car—unless it were stolen!

Being tired out I slept late, so that I hurried through breakfast to reach the Putnam House by ten o'clock. Verne Bookmiller awaited me there; he had grown impatient already, and deserted his usual seat upon the green-painted bench to stump back and forth along the porch, tugging at his square, gray beard. Seeing me he consulted a huge silver watch.

"Five minutes late, doc!" he accused. "Let's get goin'. Gotta hurry back home, so's t' fix some new trap nests f'r my hens. Hey, Phil!" he shouted into the open door of the hotel. "Come on out; here's the doc!"

Phil Riley emerged and waddled down the steps upon legs absurdly bowed. His deputy sheriff's star was pinned to a suspender buckle as evidence that this was an official expedition. His wizen, nut-cracker face was twisted into a quizzical grin.

"Hello, doc!" said he dryly. "You don't expect any o' them Cannery Town millionaires would ride in a' old, bunged-up boat, do yuh?"

"Climb in, Phil," I invited, opening my car door, "and don't try to be funny. It's too early in the morning."

The two men wedged themselves into the seat beside me, and we drove down Main Street and across the N. Y. & O. tracks toward the blackened remnants of machinery which alone remained to show the site of the Black Valley Packing Co.'s plant.

As we passed the depot I heard a far-distant whistle. Bookmiller glanced again at his watch, then up the track

at a rapidly approaching banner of smoke and steam.

"Ten-fifteen's on time," he remarked. "More'n you c'n say f'r us; we're quarter of an hour late."

"Quit grumbling," I advised. "You're not working by the hour, you know. Here we are, anyhow. Look at 'em scatter!"

I swung off the Creek Road into the rutted side path which led to Cannery Town. As we stopped beside the nearest shack a rabble of ragged children dropped their play and fled, shrieking, at sight of Phil Riley's badge.

"Looks like they was some guilty consciences hereabouts!" grinned Verne. "Better cover up that star, Phil, if yuh wanta ask any questions."

Indeed, it had that look. The children disappeared; a group of ill-dressed men who had been loafing beneath the awnings of Cannery Town's one store, separated at once, its members hurrying away in various directions. Several slatternly women, who had shouted at each other from doorsteps and open windows, vanished also. There was a general slamming of doors; Cannery Town had retired to its tents.

I locked the ignition of my car, thankful that my spare tires were padlocked to their holder, and the three of us walked on into the huddle of shacks.

Cannery Town was dingy, dirty, malodorous. I had not realized how bad it was. We followed a winding path, between shacks set anyhow, facing any way, stumbling over heaps of refuse and tin cans, dodging clotheslines heavy with wet, unclean garments, and conscious of hostile eyes that peered from every crack. Yet no one met us to ask our business; all doors were shut against us.

"Hos-pit-able, ain't they?" grumbled Phil. "I've a good mind t' bust in one o' these doors, just t' teach 'em manners!"

But he did not, of course. Instead, we proceeded upon our voyage of discovery, poking and prying here and there, until we had reached the far side of the scattered settlement. Here we paused for a general survey.

"Folks livin' in all o' those places," decided Verne Bookmiller. "That's a barn, yonder, though."

We went and looked in; but it was a tiny place, quite filled by a single stall containing a dejected-looking mule, a hog pen, also occupied, and an ancient, dish-wheeled lumber wagon.

"Couldn't 've kept an auto there," decided Phil Riley.

We wandered farther. Finally Verne stopped beside a peculiarly unkempt shack near the center of the settlement. It was covered with tar paper, and had one small window, stuffed with rags. A rusty, battered bit of stove pipe served as chimney. Its sagging door stood half open. Behind it was a sort of lean-to, mostly made of bits of old packing cases.

"Nobody home," decided Riley, and thrust the shack's door wide. "Hey, you fellers inside!"

No answer. We peeped in. There was but one room, floored with rough boards; and it was both dirty and bare. A rust-red stove in one corner was quite cold. There was a decrepit table spread with newspapers, on which were two tin plates, still containing the unsavory remnants of a meal. Big, bluebottle flies were thick about them. The only other articles in the way of furnishings were one three-legged chair, a soap box, and along one side a pair of bunks, roughly built against the wall and heaped with filthy, ragged bedding.

"Huh!" grunted Bookmiller. "An' they's been folks livin' here, too! Don't it beat all?"

Overhead, a few rough boards, laid from plate to plate beneath the rafters, made a sort of ceiling over one half the room. This its inmates used as a loft, apparently, for old clothes were heaped

there, and the end of a cheap, imitation-leather suit case showed itself. I fancied that I heard a stealthy movement up there, but dismissed it as fancy.

"Huh!" repeated Verne. "Let's get outa here."

He turned away, but I checked him, struck by a new idea. "Hold on, boys!" I advised. "Suppose we look in that shed back there?"

"What for?" asked Verne. "It's empty."

It was; that could easily be seen, for the lean-to had no doors. But I persisted. "It's the only place we've seen big enough to store an automobile in. Won't do any harm to look."

We went around the corner of the house and peered into the lean-to. It had but three walls, of which the side of the house made one; its front was open to the air.

"Empty!" he repeated. "Couldn't hide a cat in there—let alone a automobile."

"You didn't expect to find that rebuilt car here now, did you," I asked, "seeing Hank Sutton's got it parked back of his place? But look!"

My random suspicion had justified itself. The shed had no floor; I pointed to the soft earth just within it.

"By gosh, doc! Looks like you had a hunch."

Riley dropped to his knees to look closer. There in the soft dirt of the shed's bottom were the tracks of automobile tires, plain to see! Within a few days, certainly since the last hard rain, a motor car had stood there.

"What's more," Phil Riley went on, in growing excitement, "I bet it was that old junk! Lookit—here's the mark of a patch on one o' them tires."

So there was; and when I leaned down to look closer, I was sure that it was the same patch. It left exactly such an impression as I had seen in the dust of the Savage Road last Tuesday.

"We ought to take an impression of that; it may be important," said I. "Look close, both of you, anyhow; I want you to be able to swear to that patch!"

They looked, then rose and turned to me, rather uncertainly. "What next, doc?" asked Verne.

"Next? Well, we'd best find out who this place belongs to, and who left that motor car there, and who took it away—if we can."

"I do' know." Phil shook his head dubiously. "It'll be hard t' get the truth outa anybody in Cannery Town."

We were passing the door of the little house as he spoke; and I was sure I heard a stealthy movement within.

"Somebody's in there, boys!" I shouted. "Quick, now!"

We all rushed in. I saw no one; but Phil's quicker eye caught the glint of a face above us.

"There he is! Up yonder, in the loft!" he cried, and leaped with an agility hardly to be expected of his bandy legs.

A shrill squeak, as of a trapped rat, and Phil dropped, gripping a scrawny shoulder. Now we saw a half-grown boy, crouched at the edge of those boards overhead. Despite Phil's grip, he struggled furiously to be free and retreat, clinging to his refuge like a snail to its shell. It took the three of us to bring him down without injury.

Then he stood among us, shock-headed, trembling, but defiant. "You go on," he half snarled, half whined. "Le' me alone, yuh big stiffs! I ain't done nothin'."

"Who lives here, son?" asked Verne mildly.

The gentle query seemed to take our captive by surprise. No doubt he had looked for blows, at the least. He began to sniff and choke.

"F-frank Bub-bartelone, m-mister," he sobbed. "Him an' that Bohar feller. You—you ain't a-goin' t' tell on me, are

you? Frank 'ud c-cut my throat, he would. I—I was j-jus' lookin' round."

"To see what you c'd steal, I s'pose," remarked Phil. But Bookmiller silenced him.

"Shut up, Phil; don't scare the boy. We ain't goin' t' hurt you, sonny. Needn't cry about it. Nor we won't tell Bartelone, neither. You say Frank Bartelone and that Bohar live here; that right?"

"Uh-huh," nodded the boy uncertainly. "They're in jail now, both of 'em; an' I was j-jus' l-lookin'——"

"All right," said Verne. "Run along, now; and don't talk about this. Not a word, mind, or we'll tell Frank when he gets out of jail that you were stealing his things! Here, sonny. Now, beat it." He gave the boy a dime and released him.

A second he stared at us from bright, beady eyes like an animal's; then, as he realized that he was free, the boy gave one leap and vanished. We could hear his fleeing feet thump on the path outside.

We three looked at each other.

"Bartelone and Bohar," said Phil Riley. "W'y, say! That's the two fellers I pinched, other day, f'r gettin' drunk an' raisin' hob round the hotel. They're over to the lockup yet. An', come to think of it, they had upward of two hundred dollars between them. I wondered where they'd got it."

"Come along," I urged. "Let's get back to town quick! I think I know where they got it; out of Albert Marden's pockets, after he was dead! Maybe we can persuade them to show us where they've hid the rest."

Whereupon we ran back to my car and drove toward Black Valley Town as fast as it would go. We were excited; I most of all. For I felt myself on the verge of important discoveries. The solution of our murder mystery was almost beneath my hand; and, best of all, Peter Groshin seemed eliminated.

It was nearly noon when we came into town and drove up Main Street. Hank Thornton was just descending the steps of the Citizens' Bank as I slowed up to turn the corner toward the village jail. Seeing me, he paused.

I stopped, and Hank, who was president of the bank, came out to the car. He was a quiet, thick-set man, always very deliberate, cool and calm. But now his kindly face wore a troubled look.

"Say, doctor," he began, stroking his curled mustache after a habit he had. "Say, doctor, Peter Groshin was in here this morning. He—I'd hate to think it amounted to anything, but he made a pretty big deposit. He brought in a whole lot of money; and only laughed when I asked him about it."

"A lot of money?" I repeated, and my heart sank. "How much?"

"Just seventy-five thousand dollars," said Thornton slowly. "In a cashier's check from the Pittsburgh City Bank."

"Thanks, Hank," I managed to say. Mechanically I started the car and drove on. Seventy-five thousand dollars! Exactly the sum Albert Marden had carried, according to Schultze.

It was incredible. The boy's folly angered me. Did he think us such utter idiots, then? Did he suppose we could be deceived so easily? That by taking the currency stripped from a murdered man's body to Pittsburgh, depositing it there and drawing it out again by means of a cashier's check, he could blind us to its origin?

I laughed shortly. "It was two hundred dollars these boys had, wasn't it, Phil?" I inquired. "Yes. Well, that's hardly worth bothering with now, is it?" I turned back into Main Street and started up the hill.

"Where you goin' now?" asked Verne. "This ain't the way to jail."

"Out on the Savage Road," I told him. "We're going to pay Peter Groshin a visit!"

CHAPTTR XIII.

A BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION.

THEREAFTER we rode in an uneasy silence, which Phil Riley broke at last.

"Say, doc!" he asked. "Don't you s'pose that Bartelone done it, after all? Where'd a feller like that get two hundred dollars?"

"That's easy," I answered grimly. "From Peter Groshin, to pay for that car he bought, and used to load Albert Marden into!"

Riley said no more, and presently we reached the Groshin place and turned into its yard.

Peter himself came out to meet us, dressed in his best, wearing a white starched collar. His black eyes shone, and his swarthy face was wreathed in smiles. He looked astonishingly care-free and happy.

He came out to the car, his hand extended cordially. "Why, this is just fine, doctor!" he cried. "And you, Phil, and Mr. Bookmiller. I never supposed you'd remember; mother'll be so pleased!"

And he shook vigorously the limp, astonished hands which each of us extended in turn. We gaped at him; but as I tried to word a question, Mrs. Groshin appeared on the porch.

Her face shone; she was crying happily, looking down at some trinket, a pin or a ring, which she held in both hands. "Come right in, folks!" she quavered hospitably. "It's so kind of you to think of an old woman's birthday." And she began to weep openly. "The dearest boy!" she choked. "The best son any mother ever had! Oh, I'm having such a lovely birthday!"

Bookmiller and I exchanged furtive glances. What could we do? "We gotta play up," mumbled Phil Riley. "Can't spoil her good time now!"

So we all clambered out and extended shamefaced congratulations. Luckily

Mrs. Groshin was too happy to notice our embarrassment. She wept and laughed by turns, and insisted on showing us the jewelry Peter had brought her from Pittsburgh, and telling us all about the limousine he had ordered, that was to be delivered this afternoon.

"You'll all stay for dinner, of course," she insisted. "Peter, go kill a couple more chickens! Why didn't you bring your wife, doctor? I must go right in and make a cake. Nancy'll be here presently."

And she bustled into the kitchen, wiping her wet eyes so that she might look again at the brooch her son had given her. Peter started for the hen park, and we followed. Here was our chance.

"Hold on, Peter!" I ordered, and drew him into the barn. "Come in here, out of sight. We've got some questions to ask."

He complied willingly enough. "Isn't it great!" he exclaimed, and slapped me on the back. "And to think I called father a sucker for doing it. Did you ever see anybody happier than my mother?" And he shook hands with us all round once more.

"Peter!" said I wonderingly. Was the fellow mad? He did not seem to dream of our ugly errand here. "Stop raving, and listen to me. Where did you get all this money?"

Peter laughed aloud. "Of course!" He slapped my back again. "Say, you ought to have seen old Thornton's face when I brought in the check. He was so flabbergasted I wouldn't explain. Let him wonder a while, I said to myself. Why, doc, it's from that oil stock; that Jaguar Oil Co. stock my father bought before he died."

I remembered then. Ten years before, a very plausible salesman had visited Black Valley, peddling shares of this "Jaguar" stock. The company had been named, I suppose, by some promoter with a sense of humor, who dared

not come right out and call it "Wild Cat" as it deserved. Most of the town, having been bitten before, refused him; but Frank Groshin, Peter's father, had bought I don't know how many shares, at five cents each, sure to advance to a dollar as soon as they struck oil.

But they didn't strike oil; and the stock, I supposed, had been thrown out as trash years ago. Could it be true that this stuff was actually worth money now?

"I got a letter from some brokers in Buffalo last Tuesday," Peter went on. "They said Standard Oil was buying up those old shares, just as a speculation. They weren't worth anything, probably, but they could afford to experiment; so they offered ten cents a share for them. That would make a thousand dollars—twice what father paid. I was tickled sick, and I set right out to find them. But it took quite a while; finally I dug 'em out, the other afternoon, and started for the depot right away. I wanted to be sure and get the money for mother's birthday, you see; I hadn't told her a word. I wanted to surprise her."

"But," I objected, "you didn't go to Buffalo. And you brought back seventy-five thousand dollars, instead of a thousand."

Peter smiled thinly. "That Buffalo crowd tried to sting me," he explained. "Thought a country sucker'd be easy, I suppose. Well, they nearly got away with it. But I met a fellow on the train—Bill Sims; I knew him in Cornell, when I took the 'short-horn' course there. He's an engineer; and he was on his way to Pittsburgh, to work for the Jaguar Oil Co. He told me they'd struck a gusher, and the stock was worth almost anything. Two big concerns were working quietly, each trying to buy control."

He paused and grinned again. "So, naturally, I didn't go to Buffalo. I went right on to Pittsburgh, and Bill Sims took me in and introduced me to the

president of the Jaguar Co. And they bought my stock—ten thousand shares that father bought for five cents each—and paid me seven dollars and a half. Seventy-five thousand dollars I got for 'em in a cashier's check from the Pittsburgh City Bank. Whoopee!" He slapped my back again.

I heaved a tremendous sigh. So far, so good. Peter had not robbed the dead, at least. "But I'm not through yet," I told him. "Peter, you had a fight with this Marden—this man that was murdered out there Tuesday."

Peter nodded. "So Nancy told you? I wish she hadn't; but you'll keep it quiet, won't you? I'd hate to have the newspapers full of all sorts of stories about her. You know the kind of thing they'd print, some of 'em."

I studied his calm face. He seemed mildly annoyed, but in no way alarmed or anxious. "Was that the only reason?"

"Of course," he answered simply. "The fellow offered Nancy a ride and got fresh. He stopped the auto right by where I was at work mending fence, and I heard Nancy scream. So I came running, and plugged him one." He regarded tough brown knuckles with mild satisfaction. "Split my thumb open again where I'd cut it that morning."

"You knocked him out," said I, "and walked off with Nancy. But you came back alone!"

"She's told you all about it," replied Peter carelessly. "She'd broken that glass dagger of hers, you see; and I started back to look for the blade of it." He stopped, for the first time looking rather sheepish and ashamed.

"Well? What then?" I urged.

"Why, I got thinking. This letter from Buffalo had come that morning, and I was hunting father's stock. And I remembered there was an old box up in that shanty barn of ours, right at the edge of Lost Nation, you know." I nodded; it was the barn in which I had

suspected him of hiding the rebuilt machine. "I stored it there after father died," the boy continued, "and now I remembered there were some old papers in it, along with clothes and things. So I skipped over there to look. I forgot all about Nancy's dagger."

"Then you didn't go back to Marden's car at all?"

"Why, no. Was that the dead man's name? No, I cut across lots to this barn. And when I got through hunting in this old chest, I had to run to get home. But I saw his auto, that big roadster, going past on the Hardscrable Road, so I thought he'd come to and gone on."

"And that's all you know about it?" I pressed.

"Why, yes. You didn't think I killed the fellow, did you?" he asked, as though the idea came to him now for the first time.

"Didn't we? Salvator Rosa saw you driving that car, the one they found the murdered man in later, and you said you'd bought it."

Peter laughed. "That old boat? Hadn't you found out about that, doc? Why, I did think of buying it. Mother wanted an auto. But when I heard of this oil stock, I decided to buy her a new car."

"You came near getting into trouble," I told him irritably. "Why in the devil didn't you speak out and tell us all this before?"

He shrugged. "What for? We didn't know anything about the murder, Nancy and I. It would only have made trouble for her, if we told."

"But about that car? If we knew who owned it, we'd have caught the murderer before this."

"That rebuilt junk?" Peter looked ashamed. "Don't you know whose it is yet?" He kicked at the loose hay about his feet. "Fact is, doc," he confessed, "I've been so taken up with looking for that oil stock and planning what I'd do

with a thousand dollars, that I forgot all about the murder. I supposed the sheriff knew. And Nancy——"

"Yes, Nancy!" I cut in. "Why didn't she tell you?"

"We-ell, Nancy and I were kind of on the outs lately. You see, I forgot all about her dagger blade, and, besides, I wanted to surprise her, too; so I didn't tell about the oil stock. And she didn't like it much." Then his face cleared. "But she'll be here presently, and I'll explain it all. And then—why, I expect we can get married this summer, after all. Will you be my best man, Monty?"

I swore aloud. "Oh, yes, I suppose so. But try and remember for a minute, will you, that we're looking for a murderer! Save your love affairs till later. Who does own that car?"

"I don't know his name. Some young fellow in Cannery Town; an Italian, I think. I can point him out."

"Why didn't you do it the other night, instead of running away?"

"Running away?" he repeated blankly. "Oh, yes! I'd just found that stock—it was up in the attic, under a pile of old newspapers; I'd been through that attic four times. And I ran my horse all the way to town so I'd be sure and get the money in time for mother's birthday."

"Well," I grumbled, "you've made me trouble enough, you and your oil stock, and your birthdays. Come along to town with us now and find that dago. He must have come along in the old rebuilt machine of his and found Marden in his roadster, knocked out. And then, I suppose, he killed him and robbed him and then changed cars with him. Something scared him off, so he left the roadster in Lost Nation. Or, maybe, he meant to go back after it later. Come on, Peter! If this chap didn't kill Marden himself he must know who did. It was done by the driver of that car, I'm sure."

"Well, if I must," Peter yielded un-

graciously. "But wait till Nancy comes, won't you?"

"No!" I shouted, exasperated. "I've waited as long as I intend to."

But just then Nancy drove into the yard in her father's flivver, and Peter ran to meet her.

They talked together, low-voiced, for a time. Whatever explanations passed between them the result seemed to satisfy both; for presently Peter reached into a pocket and produced a small velvet box. He took a ring from it and slipped it on Nancy's slender finger, and then they kissed, while we onlookers discreetly turned away and talked about the corn crop. Evidently, Nancy had forgiven her lover for forgetting about her stiletto blade.

It had been a natural irritation at Peter's forgetfulness and not a sense of guilt, that had made her flare out at me so, the other day, when she "never wanted to see the dagger again—or me!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SOLUTION.

WE crowded into my car and drove away, a reluctant Peter hanging on the running board, head on shoulder, waving at Nancy and his mother until we were out of sight.

This time we reached the jail without interruption, and Peter looked in at one barred window. He withdrew without being seen by either of the prisoners.

"That's the man!" he whispered. "The biggest one. He owned that old car, or claimed to, anyhow. He tried to sell it to me."

Beyond sight of the lockup we held a consultation. It was finally decided that the two prisoners should be brought before Justice of the Peace Shattuck once more, forgiven the remaining five days of their sentence, fined ten dollars apiece, lectured severely, and warned to leave town.

Meanwhile, Verne Bookmiller and I would go to Cannery Town and hide ourselves in the loft of Bartelone's shack, where we had found the boy. There we would wait until the two prisoners returned, in the hope of overhearing enough to justify their rearrest, or at least, of locating Marden's stolen money.

Phil Riley, having freed his prisoners after Shattuck had fined them, would follow at discretion, and be ready to stop them if they escaped us. As for Peter Groshin, there was no holding him. He was already on his way home to his mother and Nancy.

So Verne and I set out. Our only difficulty was in reaching Bartelone's shack unseen. Cannery Town folk were clannish; some one might warn him of our presence. But Verne arranged that, with characteristic canniness.

When we reached Cannery Town and left my car, he looked about until he saw the shock-headed boy we had surprised in the loft. To him Verne whispered, then beckoned, holding a silver quarter between thumb and finger.

The queer child approached cautiously, circling, cringing, coming on in little dashes, always poised to flee, like a dog more used to kicks than caresses. But Verne was patient, and at last he came close and clutched eagerly at the proffered coin.

"Lookit here, sonny," coaxed Bookmiller. "If Frank Bartelone was to know what you did, he'd lick you, huh?"

The child shivered. "He'd kill me," he asserted, plainly convinced that he told the truth.

"Well, listen! We wanta take Bartelone off where he can't hurt you nor nobody else, see? An' we gotta get into his house, an' hide, 'thout him or anybody else knowin'. C'n you fix that f'r us, bub?"

The boy nodded eagerly. "Sure I can! How much?"

"I'll give you fifty cents," promised Verne, "besides that quarter you got a'ready."

That was evidently riches, for the boy jumped up and down, clapping his hands. "Aw right," he promised. "You jus' watch y'r chancet! I'll come back for the money."

And he was off, whistling shrilly. From somewhere a disreputable mongrel dog came bounding; a hardened gladiator of a dog, scarred with combat, one ear hanging in tattered rags. The boy looked over a shoulder, nodding assurance, and disappeared.

Presently, from the farther side of Cannery Town arose a fierce, shrill outcry; a tumult of yelps and barks and ferocious growlings. "Dog fight! Dog fight!" somebody shouted; and the population of Cannery Town turned out *en masse*.

Dog fighting was evidently popular hereabout. The dozen loafers in sight, several slatternly women, even the children, ran eagerly toward that distant tumult. In the excitement we had no difficulty in slipping into Bartelone's house. Presently we were safely ensconced in that dark, evil-smelling loft, unnoticed, I was sure, by any one.

Soon I heard a cautious whistle below and peeped out to see our accomplice. He held out a dirty hand.

"Gimme fifty cents, mister!"

I paid him thankfully, and he vanished.

Thereafter we waited in silence, enduring the heat and the varied odors of our hiding place as best we might.

Our vigil lasted an hour, or nearly, and then we heard footsteps outside, and the grumble of quarreling voices.

Two men entered; peering through a convenient crack. I saw that they were Bartelone and his companion, the man Bohar. Both were plainly in a very ill temper; they snarled at each other, continuing what seemed to be a long-sustained argument.

"We've got to go, right now!" declared Bohar. I shall not attempt to reproduce their broken speech; they talked sometimes in villainous English, and sometimes Bartelone lapsed into Italian, which I understand tolerably. Again Bohar resorted to voluble Lithuanian, or some tongue of which neither of us understood a word.

"We've got to go," said Bohar. "Come on; split, and let's get out before they pinch us again."

"You coward!" sneeringly replied the Italian with a pungent epithet in his native tongue. "There's no such rush."

"I tell you there is! Over in the jail I shook in my shoes every minute, expecting to be arrested for murder."

"Don't be a fool! If they guessed, do you suppose they'd let us go like this?"

"How do I know? Maybe they're spying, now."

"Nonsense! They haven't sense enough, these farmers. Five days and nobody has even guessed."

"Suppose they find out about that junk you stole? If they knew we drove that the other day——"

"Bah! They know nothing. If they did, we only say, 'Yes, it was ours, but we sold it to Peter Groshin.'"

"And he calls us a liar," grumbled Bohar. "We ought to have gone on in the dead man's auto, like I wanted."

"How can he call us liars? He was there, near by, alone; we saw him! If we swear boldly, we could hang him."

"Or he us! Why didn't we go on in that big auto? Now it is lost and we just out of jail!"

"Yes," said Bartelone sneeringly.

"Go on in the dead man's car and be stopped in five miles. 'Hold on, you dagoes! It's a pinch; you killed this feller!' Better to lose the car; we have the money. Besides, who would know that Jerry Lapham would find it there? I expected we could get it next day easy."

"You expect a lot," said Bohar. "No need to have killed him, anyway; I say it again: We could have just knocked him over the head."

"Ah, bah! There is not as much blood in your whole body, Bohar, as I lost from this cut!"—and Bartelone held up his right thumb—"from the glass when I stabbed him! Knock his head, huh? A big man, fit to beat us both, if he should come to. No, I stabbed him, as we do in Italy. It was the only way. Look you, if he lived, he begins right away, 'Where is my money?' And they hunt harder than now. More, I did not use my own stiletto, but a bit of glass lying there. Who could trace that to us?"

"Maybe so, maybe so," grumbled Bohar. "But now it is time to run away, quick!"

Bartelone shrugged. "With such a coward as you, perhaps!" he conceded. "You would hurry to tell all and save your neck, if we were caught; I know that very well! But come! The man is dead, and we have his money and his watch, and nobody knows. We will divide, as you say, and go away at once." He stretched comfortably and yawned. "As for me, I shall go back to Italy and be rich!"

Thereupon the two men set to work and moved the rusty stove, and then pried up a board beneath it. Bartelone reached his hand beneath the floor and brought it up; I caught the glint of yellow-backed bills.

"Here," said he to Bohar. "Your share, coward!"

The other riffled a sheaf of bills. "What?" he screeched; "only five thousand? It is not enough!"

Then Verne Bookmiller took a hand. Lithe as a cat, for all his bulk, he leaped from the loft edge and landed upon Bohar's back.

"It's too much, young feller!" he said.

I followed in the same instant and struck Bartelone's bent back so hard that

he was crushed to the floor. I am a very strong man; it was not difficult to hold him beyond the possibility of resistance.

Phil Riley, hearing the commotion, leaped in at the door with a pair of handcuffs, and presently both men were secured. And then, as his confederate had prophesied, Bohar began to talk.

Babbling desperately, while Bartelone eyed him in venomous calm, the miserable fellow told us the whole story, laying all blame upon his friend, protesting himself innocent, insisting that he was about to hunt the sheriff up and tell him everything.

It was as I had guessed—at last. The precious pair, driving up from Crab Hollow in the old rebuilt car, had found Marden unconscious in his car by the roadside. Bartelone began to search him; Marden roused, struggled, and was stabbed to death with the blade of Nancy Fuller's glass stiletto, picked up from the floor of the car. Then they robbed his body of money, watch, and jewelry, loaded him into the old auto, and drove it off the bank, stupidly hoping that it would be taken for an accident. They drove off in the roadster, but left it in Lost Nation after searching it carefully.

Bartelone planned, so Bohar declared, to go back for it next day.

Beneath the floor of their shack we found seventy-five thousand dollars, less only about three hundred; and Marden's watch, cuff links, purse, and even his collar buttons.

Bartelone was convicted of murder in the first degree; his accomplice got off with twenty years. As for Marden's money, it went to a distant cousin in Illinois. I am thankful to say that Mr. John G. Schultze failed to recover one cent of it. He is in the Federal prison at Atlanta now; so the money wouldn't do him any good anyway.

Nancy Fuller and Peter Groshin were married in July. I went to the wedding and afterward saw them off on their honeymoon. Nancy's going-away hat was fastened to her red hair—rather out of the present mode, I believe—with a long pin whose head was a curiously wrought bit of glass, the hilt of that ill-fated stiletto.

Though I wished them both joy, I could not help blaming Peter a little for all the work and all the worry his absorption in oil stocks, birthdays, and a red-headed girl had caused me.

THE END.



PRISON TERM FOR CHEMIST CONVICTED AS SWINDLER

IN the Mineola, Long Island, court, Louis Enright was convicted a short time ago of swindling in connection with his scheme for making gasoline from bog peat. Enright, who is seventy-six years old, is a chemist. He was sentenced to serve not less than five or more than nine and a half years in prison. Several months previous to his sentence he was suspended on his plea that he would make restitution to those whom he had victimized. At the end of the time allotted to him to do this, none of his victims had received anything, despite the fact that his own bank account showed deposits amounting to more than \$100,000 in the last two years. The prospect of having to go to jail seemed to daze the old man. Cross-examination failed to bring out the source from which he got the money which he deposited, nor to account for the disposition he had made of the large amounts which his account showed had been withdrawn from the bank.

Great Escapes

THE PATIENCE OF FRANK VAN WEZER

By *Edgeworth Downer*

Author of "Embezzlers," "Adventures in Coa," etc.

WHO is a hero? Is he the man who fires the imagination with some bold extravagance of conduct or is he the patient and dauntless sufferer, the unconquerable soul? The mighty men of the school histories, the conquerors, warriors, hunters, explorers, mariners and great folk. Are these more heroic than the pirates and brigands of the story books or merely more respectable? Is any one of them so fine as the zeal-driven martyr? And what of the true heroes of modernity, the scientific researchers and experimenters whose illimitable tenacity and self-sacrifice have made our civilization?

Some forgotten cynic remarked that the man who ate the first oyster displayed more courage than Alexander, since he dared the unknown while the Scourge of Asia went out to face only the familiar perils of march and battle. But the world is likely to judge a hero on two premises, the romantic aspects of his action and the results of his deed. This mode of weighing and reckoning leaves out of the problem a kind of hero who belongs to obscurity and the commonplace yet whose deed may involve a kind of conduct rarer and more admirable, on sober thought, than that of the most famous adventurer. The man who performs a swift and daring action may be urged to his feat by the ardor and excitement of the moment, and ordinary situations may find him a trifler and poltroon. He may be incapable of any sacrifice and frequently is a mere player

for applause. But the fellow who goes about his work silently and continuously, in the face of overpowering obstacles, without hope of celebrity, with a divine perseverance and unshakable determination, must have real attributes of character. Our judgment of the two men depends upon whether we admire dash or patience the more.

This question has an important bearing upon escapes and the manner in which we ought to rank escapers. Undoubtedly the most celebrated of these prison heroes are those whose striking and arresting prodigies of action have captured an agile public fancy. The writer takes the liberty of dissenting from this popular acceptance and placing in the shining ranks the names of men whose deeds have been those of sustained and terrible patience.

An illustrative case: In June, 1907, there escaped from the stout old prison at Gera, the capital city of the little principality of Reuss-Schleiz, in Germany, a man named Schaarschmidt, whose achievement through determination eclipses most feats of valor and daring. He had been sentenced to a long term for robbery, and was confined, because of several efforts at escape, in a large solitary cell, constructed entirely of solid masonry and great beams of seasoned oak. There was a small window in the rear of the cell, giving upon a street. Instead of being barred with steel or iron rods this window was partly closed by an inner crosswise beam of oak measuring seven by seven inches and an

outer perpendicular timber of nine by nine inches. The prison authorities understood that these timbers were not proof against the attack of a patient and determined man with any kind of steel tool. They had suffered an experience with a prisoner who took a metal shank from his shoe and all but succeeded in cutting the oak. So Schaarschmidt was deprived of his shoes and supplied with a pair of thick felt slippers. Let him try these on the oak if he liked.

Not content with these precautions, the scrupulous German warden had the cell examined daily, and in order to prevent the troublesome convict from getting at any tools that might be lying about the workshops of the prison or any cutlery from the dining room, the man was never taken from his cell except for a weekly bath and barbering. His meals were brought to him in his cage, and the soft pewter spoon and fork with which he was permitted to eat were taken from him and carefully accounted for after each meal.

The prisoner must have realized that the heavy oaken beams, formidable as they appeared, furnished the one point which he might attack in the hope of escape, but he must have both a tool for his work and some substance by which he might conceal from the daily intrusive eyes of his keepers his ravages against the wood. This latter soon made itself welcome in the shape of the rye bread which was handed out to convicts in great heavy slabs. Any one familiar with this abomination of the baker's art will realize its possibilities, for it is a dense, brownish-black, half-soggy mass which may be nourishing enough in a sound stomach, but looks as unappetizing as clay and lies in any delicate digestive tract like so much wax. But Schaarschmidt had reason to bless this detestable bread, for it looked exactly like old oak. He could make a mass of the inside of his bread and plaster over

any scars in his beams, with excellent hope of deceiving the keepers.

So the man went to work on the oak with his teeth. Like a great rat he gnawed away for three months, little by little, when the night guards were far enough away to be deaf to his rodent operations. At last, he had chewed out of the inner and smaller beam a piece big enough to permit his body to squeeze through. He then attacked the larger outer timber and also ground his way through this in a little more than four months. On a fine June night he wriggled his body through the opening he had made and gained his freedom, but not without terribly lacerating his back and groin where the thickest part of his body got caught in the jagged ends of the gnawed beams.

For all this prodigy of patience, labor and suffering, he was at liberty just three weeks. Then the police at Erfurt picked him up and readily identified him, both by the Bertillon records and by the scars on his body where he had twisted his way out between the timbers. His teeth had been worn to stumps by his fearful misuse of them, and his jaw muscles had developed so that his lower face had the look of a giant ape's. The man should have had his freedom and a decoration, but unimaginative officialdom sent him to a stronger prison with something added to his term.

Who will say that such an escape is not a work superior to the rank and file of so-called sensational get-aways? It lacks the brilliancy and imagination of the flights that make the widest appeal, just as the flashy accomplishment of a military hero will please more people than the prodigious watching, waiting and calculating of an astronomer, though the one has merely destroyed a rival, and the other disclosed a new universe.

One of the foremost American examples of escape by the exercise of this limitless patience and agonizing perse-

verance was the flight from San Quentin Prison, California, by Frank van Wezer or Von Weser, at the end of May, 1890. This man was also a German, which fact may suggest that these escapes by means of intense and prolonged application are typical of the plodding and enduring Teutonic temperament.

Van Wezer, as the man's name stands on the prison records, probably through error, was sentenced in the early eighties for the wanton killing of a Chinese in Colusa county. He was confined at first in Folsom prison in 1884, after a capital sentence had been reduced to life imprisonment, and immediately set out to contrive his escape. Once he tried the simple expedient of walking away when the prison was enveloped in a thick fog, but a breeze stirred and the sun came out at the crucial moment and he was caught. On another occasion he tried to ride out of prison in a refuse wagon, hiding under a mass of rotten straw from the stables, having previously observed that these carts usually passed out without special examination, but this time, apparently by sheer perversity of fortune, a keeper thrust his cane into the pile and discovered Van Wezer, who went back to his cell with a smile. This was, by the way, a very old escaping trick, used countless times on both sides of the Atlantic and often with success.

In 1888 Warden McComb was transferred from Folsom Prison to San Quentin, whither he took with him a batch of troublesome inmates, among them this persistent German. Van Wezer had been guilty of four attempts at Folsom without ever getting beyond the walls. It was, however, considered wise to take him to the stronger prison, one of the hardest to break in the western United States, by the way.

Entering San Quentin in the first weeks of 1888, Van Wezer immediately renewed his efforts to gain his freedom, and his persistence at his design makes up one of the most intriguing of prison

records. In two years he made no less than six major attempts to get away, in addition to several abortive efforts. Twice he hid out in the prison. On the first occasion he was found in the oven of the bakery, which he was forced to abandon when a baker, not knowing of Van Wezer's concealment, started the fires. Somewhat later he hid in the lumber yard and it was two days before the officials found him. The man had managed to store up a few provisions and some water in advance of this attempt and he was evidently ready to stay concealed until the officials might decide that he had got outside the walls and relaxed their vigilance within, thereby affording him an opportunity. But another convict, who was privy to the tenacious prisoner's plans, betrayed him in the hope of getting a pardon for himself, and Van Wezer went back to his cell, smiling, once more under the prison discipline.

Next this dauntless man attempted the famous trick of "Shoebox" Miller and tried to have himself nailed into a crate that was to be sent out of the prison, but he was again caught in the act and confined "in solitary" for a time. As soon as he had been released he began his planning and plotting again.

In March, 1890, toward the end of a misty afternoon, Captain Gulliver, of the prison guard, set out to inspect a part of the outer wall where erosion through the rains was said to be undermining the structure. He was outside the prison examining the wall and estimating what work would have to be done to stop the action of the water when a convict dropped down before him out of the air. He picked the man up, and to his consternation and amusement it was Van Wezer. This time the irrepressible jail breaker had got over the walls, but his usual bad luck had defeated him once more. He was led back to his prison and confronted with the warden, who threatened to be severe.

Van Wezer smiled at the official with his unbreakable good nature and said: "Well, I'm here for life, warden. I got a long time to get away in. You catch me this time. Mebbe next time I don't get caught."

The man came to be a serio-comic hero of the prison, not even the keepers being able to control their amusement at the man's strange conduct and his never failing mirth. He was a thin, stubbly-bearded, grinning little German, far too much like Joe Weber and the other Teuton comedians then so popular on the stage. To look at this odd little figure was to laugh; to hear his impossible accent was to break into guffaws. No one took him seriously and his oft-repeated attempts to get away were considered part of the comic relief against the dull prison background. They aroused merriment rather than wrath, though the warden himself seems to have sensed the desperate and unquenchable resolve that lay behind the smiling face and grotesque exterior of the convict. He had the man locked up in Crank Alley, one of the wings of the prison which was reserved for dangerous and troublesome prisoners and regarded as doubly secured and inescapable.

For a time Van Wezer was held in his cell night and day, but this order was soon rescinded and the laughable lifer and persistent escaper was assigned as prison scavenger, probably as a joke. His duty was to clean up the shops and yards after the convicts who were employed at the industrial tasks of the penitentiary. As the janitor to felons, the humblest of the humble, Van Wezer was treated to all the gibes and taunts and practical jokes of his fellows, but he didn't seem to mind. His whole imprisonment was a lark to him, to judge from his ineffable smile and his whole outward bearing.

The officers of the prison felt, at this period, that they had effectively dealt

with the man's escaping plots. He had himself demonstrated the futility of trying to hide out and of getting over the walls in the daytime. And any nocturnal attempts were apparently blocked by the strength of Crank Alley, where he was confined. The guards may be pardoned for their feeling of assurance on this last point, for the cells of Crank Alley were so formidably built that breaking one of them seemed out of the question. The side and rear walls were of solid masonry and the little window in the back gave into a narrow air shaft that rose to a height of forty-odd feet and was barred on top to defeat any simian climbing feats on the part of convicts who might manage to cut their way out through these windows. The front of each cell was not provided with bars, as in modern and more humane prisons, but with a solid steel door, twice secured with external bolts of one inch steel and again locked in the middle with an ordinary heavy key lock. Both of the big bolts, one near the top and the other near the bottom of the door, slid home three or four inches into the stone of the jam, and the top bolt had an additional device which prevented sliding back and forth once it had been shot home. There was only one small opening in this sheet of steel which formed the door, an air vent about five by four inches in dimensions at the shoulder height of an ordinary man.

When the guards opened these cells every morning they had to perform four distinct operations of unlocking. First they opened with a key the device which held the upper bolt in place. Then they slid back this bolt. Next they slid back the lower bolt, which had no double lock, and finally they opened the regular cell lock with a second key. How a man inside the cell was going to beat this multiple locking system and a solid steel door is a problem that must give the most determined escaper pause and the

practiced solver of puzzles an exquisite hour. One may file a couple of steel bars, but to cut a hole into sheet steel is another matter. And one may take an impression from a lock and fashion a skeleton key, but of what use is this when the lock has no inner keyhole and when there are three other locks and bolts, all out of reach on the outside of the door?

Here the question of watchfulness comes into play, and that involves the inner problem of Van Wezer's conduct. It seems beyond question that this undaunted escaper was by nature sunny, jovial and gifted with a grotesque personality that caused laughter at sight, but it is also certain that the man exaggerated and played upon these natural characteristics until he had his keepers and the whole prison in the frame of mind to regard him as an inconsequential buffoon whose attempts to be free were no more than the ludicrous struggles of a jester.

Van Wezer played this part for five years, first at Folsom and then at San Quentin, punctuating his comedianship with not fewer than a dozen attempts at flight. When he was caught time after time he slipped back into his own rôle with an added drollery and a furious wagging of his comic tongue, so that no one took him seriously, beyond locking him into Crank Alley with a sort of perfunctory cautiousness. He was given his humiliating task as a practical joke, but the final laugh sounded in the wrong ears, for Van Wezer turned his sweeping and scavenging to excellent account. He got a file and a steel saw from the shops where he had to sweep up after the workers. From the stable he got a piece of stout wire, and from the refuse he procured the broken end length of a crowbar, a broomstick and a piece of frayed rope. With these he went to work.

The floor of Van Wezer's cell was paved with asphalt over a layer of cinders and earth. With his crowbar the

man cut out a piece of the pavement, scooped out enough of the underlying material at a time to fill his pants pockets and disposed of it later in the yard. In this way he soon hollowed out a hiding place for his tools under the cell floor and he managed to cover the cuts in the asphalt cleverly enough to escape the guard's eyes by smearing a little dampened earth about on the floor.

The determined lifer then went to work on the upper bolt of the cell door. This feat was accomplished by using the crowbar on the jam of the door, where he managed to pry things apart sufficiently to let his fine saw through. Slowly and laboriously he cut away at such an angle that the wound in the bolt was not perceptible from the outside of the door, and he was further aided in this concealment by the fact that the bolt slid into a cover in such a manner that the cut part was concealed when the bolt was drawn open. So he sawed through the bar as far as he dared and at once turned his attention to the other fastenings.

The key lock which fastened the steel door at the center was formed of a large common lockbox which was bolted to the door on the outside and sent its bar into a receptacle, likewise bolted to the stone of the jam. There was no keyhole on the inside of the door, but the lockbox was held in place by four screw bolts, one at each corner of the box. These, of course, penetrated the steel of the door and had thoughtlessly been so placed that the boltheads were on the outside and the nuts on the inside of the door, where they might be screwed off by a prisoner with the proper tool. Van Wezer had procured the latter in the wrench stolen from the machine shop.

Yet the task of dealing with this lock was by no means as easy as may be surmised. It had to be loosened some time in advance of the actual escape, since the prisoner would have his hands full on the last night with the opening of the lower

bolt and the sawing of the remaining portion of the main or upper bolt. He believed at first that he needed only to loosen the nuts with his monkey wrench, but he soon discovered that they had been in position for many years and were so tightly held to the bolts by rust and old mineral paint that only one of them could be moved with the wrench. The other three had to be broken off. But if this were done even one day in advance of the escape the guards would see, the moment they opened the door, that an escaper had been at work. Here Van Wezer was balked for some days until it occurred to him that he might break off the iron nuts and replace them with duplicates made out of wood and colored to look like the originals. So he went to work patiently with nothing but a broken knife he had managed to pick up in the jute mill and finally managed to fashion three wooden nuts, which he later colored with paint and grease, got in the machine shop, and stuck to the door with a bit of glue filched from the carpenter's workroom.

The laughing German now believed that he could do the balance of the sawing on the upper bolt in a couple of hours and punch out the four screw bolts of the central lockbox in a few minutes when the time came for his break. He had yet, however, to deal with the sliding bolt near the floor. Van Wezer first tried to attack it as he had the top bar, by wedging the door open slightly with his crowbar and sliding his saw blade out. But the door fitted too snugly to the jam at the bottom and all his efforts to get at it were vain. He could not make room for the saw without scarring the stone jam in such a way as to attract attention.

But another method of dealing with this lock soon suggested itself. As already explained, this bolt was not secured in position after locking by any special device beyond a groove in the channel into which the handle of the bar

fitted after the bolt itself had been shot home. It was, in other words, just a glorified door bolt built exactly like those employed on cellar doors, but much larger and placed on the outside instead of within. Nothing was to hinder the prisoner or any one else from lifting the handle and sliding it open except the fact that it was far out of reach from the little air hole in the door, four and one half feet above.

At this stage of his planning Van Wezer possessed himself of the broomstick and the piece of stiff wire, hoping that by making a loop of the wire at the end of the stick he might reach down on the outside of the door, catch the knob or handle of the bolt, lift it out of the groove and then slide back the bar itself. But there was more trouble ahead here, for the old bar fitted very tightly into its channels and was also choked with rust and old paint, so that the guards who had to withdraw it every morning sometimes swore over its stubbornness. Van Wezer, trying to budge it from his little air hole with his crude tackle could make not the slightest impression. He was apparently foiled by the least formidable of his locks.

Here his infallible good humor, his gift for badinage and the contemptuous opinion in which he was held by the keepers came once more to his aid. The next time his keeper swore as he worked at this recalcitrant bolt Van Wezer responded by teasing the guard and wound up by offering to clean and oil the bar so that it would slide easily. The whole thing came about so naturally and lightly and the reputation of the prisoner was so frivolous that the keeper saw no harm in the plan and told Van Wezer he might oil up all the bolts in Crank Alley if he was looking for work.

So the prisoner, determined to divert any suspicion got himself tools and oils and went to work on the bolts of the whole cell block, beginning at cell No. 61, which was the first in his row, and

working his way gradually along to his own, No. 78. The work was, of course, done under the eyes of a keeper, and inspected afterward by the deputy warden, so that Van Wezer had no opportunity to loosen or weaken the bolts in any way. But all he needed was a bar that moved freely and silently in its channels. To get this result on his own door he had to attain it on all the others. So he labored and sweated for two whole weeks, scraping and polishing and oiling the bolts till every one of them worked as easily as a bearing running in grease. At last he completed the work and felt that he was ready for his great emprise.

Van Wezer followed the practice of escapers and waited for a moonless and starless night for the execution of his final piece of work. It came on a Friday night just before the end of May. Lights were out at nine o'clock, and shortly after ten the escaper decided that he might resume his work on the top bar with his saw. He was very near to freedom and yet his perils were great. He had no way of knowing whether the convicts about him would keep his secret in case they heard him cutting at the bolt. He did not know whether his previous operations had been overheard and reported to the warden, so that he might find the end of a rifle poked into his ribs just as he stepped from the door, a pleasant sensation he had experienced before. Finally, he could not be sure of the whereabouts of the keeper who patrolled his corridor at irregular intervals. The man might be a foot or a quarter of a mile away. Van Wezer could trust to nothing but a fine sense of hearing to guard him against this man.

So the prisoner went to work on the bar with his saw, making one slash at a time, pausing to listen intently, making a second cut at the bar, listening again, sawing one stroke more and stopping to hear if any footfall came his way. By this arduous and tedious method he

finally cut the last thread of steel and knew that the most formidable of his obstacles was out of the way. He now quickly knocked off the wooden bolt heads, unscrewed the last steel nut, drove the screw bolts from their places with a long nail and blows from his wrench and heard the lockbox fall to the floor—another barrier removed.

The clatter of the falling box evidently disturbed some of the sleeping convicts, for Van Wezer took alarm at vague sounds, crept into his bunk and lay still for twenty minutes before he slid out again, reached out of his air hole with his broomstick and loop of wire, groped in the dark for the handle of the lower bolt, caught it after many misdirected anglings and drew it back out of the socket.

The door swung open silently under his cautious pressure, for he had surreptitiously oiled the hinges while he had been at work on the bolts. He found himself in the corridor, one end of which opened into the yard like the mouth of a blind alley. There were no further doors or locks in his path except those in the high encircling wall, and these he would not have to attack. The man crept along the black length of his prison hall toward the grayish light at the opening. In a minute or two he stood under the lowering sky, with the lofty walls bulking indistinctly about him. So far he had come on his way to liberation. It may have occurred to him that he had gone further before and failed, that defeat had mocked him too often to leave room for confidence now. More likely it never occurred to this insatiable optimist that anything but success lay before him. Natures capable of such dogged and enduring patience and resolution are incapable of doubt or dejection. The thing they desire becomes an accomplished fact, and there is no room for the dampness of misgiving.

That obstacle which bulks largest to the eye and the outside imagination and

smallest in the calculations of the escape still lay across any path Van Wezer might choose—the prison wall. Fortunately for him the stone encirclement of San Quentin was not then complete. The piece nearest the buildings consisted of only a wooden stockade. This itself was twenty feet high and the abutting stone wall more than ten feet higher. Van Wezer's plan included the scaling of both for the reason that there was a deep ditch beyond the stockade, whereas fortunate circumstances had placed an intermediate landing place for him under the main portal of the higher stone wall, where the prison officials were building a gate house, about fifteen feet high. Van Wezer had watched the progress of work on this little structure outside the gates and calculated his escape so as to make use of the gate house by dropping to its roof and thence to the ground. He had also noted with satisfaction that the workmen had piled inside the prison walls a quantity of boards and beams to be used in the structure of the gate house, probably to preserve them from thieves at the very gates of the house of punishment. To lay one of these long boards against the inside of the stockade and clamber up its oblique length to the top and thence to the top of the wall was not too great an exertion for a light, agile man.

But there were still other obstacles. In most prisons the sentries on the walls are withdrawn at night after the men have been counted into their cells, but San Quentin was then not run on this plan, and a guard, armed with a rifle, sat all night in the little box not more than ten yards from the place where Van Wezer must go over the top to drop on the roof of the gate house. The chance of finding this man dozing was slight, for a large bell over the main gate automatically announced the hours with a booming voice that served to keep the sentry from slumber.

A guard named L. F. Smith was in

the sentry box over the main gate on this eventful Friday night, and three other armed men were posted at the corners of the wall and stockade. At midnight Guard Smith yawned and strode about his narrow coop in answer to the loud acclamations of the bell. He finished a sandwich from his lunchbox and sat down again to meditate on the uselessness of sitting on a wall all night when the men were in their cages. But he was hardly comfortable again when he heard muffled noises outside and started up, grasped his rifle and peered out into the darkness.

Not twenty feet away, indistinct in the night, the guard made out the upright figure of a man moving away along the top of the wall.

"Who's there?" the sentry challenged.

"Oh, dot's all right. It's me," came back the answer in a strong Teutonic guttural with a note of laughter at the end.

Guard Smith was disarmed, figuratively and literally. He assumed without question that the figure must be that of the corner guard who had strayed over into his neighbor's quarter for some reason of his own, and he lowered his rifle and went back into his box.

Van Wezer, chilled at the challenge of the sentry behind him, kept his self-possession and walked away, expecting every moment to hear a further challenge and be shot at from behind. A few steps brought him to the point over the main gate where the roof of the gate house rose beneath him and he drooped himself over the wall, hung by his hands and let himself fall. He landed with a crash that brought the sentry back out of his coop and sent a series of loud challenges flying into the night. But Van Wezer did not stop to hear. He crept to the edge of the roof, hung by his hands once more and dropped to earth.

On his hands and knees he crawled along close to the ground, finally gained the shelter of some brush while rifles

crashed behind him, sending bullets after the unseen escaper, and ran as fast as his strength would allow till he reached the edge of town. Probably he paused long

enough to be amused, for he had literally laughed and waited his way out of prison. Humor and determination had broken the unbreakable bonds.

IN NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE:

A Rose for a Night

By Frederick Ames Coates

The tragedy of the fall of a frail flower is prevented by a slip.]



Without Duty

By Frank Parks

A diamond smuggler divides honors with the customs authorities.

AND OTHER STORIES

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"Not According to Text"

by

Charles G. Booth

Author of "So Darned Sure," etc.

SITTING upon a round rock, "The Preacher" moodily contemplated his fallen state and the limping ruins of a shanty set precariously upon the gravelly slope before him. The sun had gone to sleep beneath a gorgeous canopy, the colors of which were already sombering their tones. Unless The Preacher intended to spend the night in the open, he would have to endure it in the shanty he was regarding with such marked disgust.

They were all the same, these deserted California shanties: lizard-haunted, vermin-infested, and reminiscent of the indescribable filth of a generation of tramps. Notwithstanding his disheveled appearance, The Preacher was a fastidious person.

His grievance against mankind was not unfounded. That morning the Los Angeles police had set him upon the high road and told him to go and to keep on going. His business at the moment was of a delicate nature, and he had deemed it advisable to obey the instructions of the police.

He had been "operating" in the oil fields. For the benefit of his "clients" he invariably strove to produce the effect of reality. When the headquarters man had tapped him on the shoulder and greeted him with "Come on, Joe," he had been "mucking" about in his oldest, most dilapidated clothing. Later, he would have blossomed forth splendidly in evening dress or cutaway

or business suit, as the occasion demanded. They were commonplace in his sinister life.

"What d'you want?" he had barked out of the corner of his thin-lipped mouth.

"You got to get, Joe, while the getting's good."

"You mean——"

"I mean now!"

He had not even been permitted to draw upon his resources, financial or otherwise, which were not inconsiderable. Nor did he attempt to turn back for that purpose. They would take care of themselves. If the full extent of his scheming was discovered in the meantime, even an hour's delay might cost him his liberty. And he was in no mind to lose that.

San Francisco offered sanctuary. But San Francisco was over six hundred miles to the north, and The Preacher had only ten dollars in his pocket. So he had struck into the interior, slanting toward the mountains, believing, not unreasonably, that the smaller towns were rich in opportunity for one of his peculiar talents. He would acquire a stake; then he would head for San Francisco via Pullman or freight car, as circumstances favored him.

From the foregoing it will be inferred that The Preacher chaplained no congregation—unless that world which hides its brightest lights beneath

a multitude of bushels may be so termed.

He was a past master in the art of living by his wits. Step by step he had ascended the ladder of his disreputable craft. Dip, second-story man, con man, and every intervening rung he had trodden cautiously and forsaken triumphantly.

Just prior to his apprehension that morning he had been selling very off-color stocks. It was a lucrative employment, and it was more nearly respectable than anything he had ever done. Respectability! How he loved the word! Some day, when he had obtained a substantial competence, he would enjoy the satisfaction it connoted.

He was compact of body, smooth of tongue, invested with a superficial air of culture which he had acquired painstakingly for the benefit of his "clients." He knew when to talk, and he knew when to listen. Intelligent women spoke of him as "that nice Mr. So-and-so." His names were many. Keen-witted men said he was a good fellow.

Some ironist of the underworld, appreciating his talents, in a flash of inspiration had called him "The Preacher." The sobriquet had stuck. His name was Joe Shaefer.

All this was with his clothes on, though, and the smooth feel of a clean shave. As he was now, with the gritty, gray dust of twenty-five miles of blistering road upon him, coating his tongue and his dry lips, and with the stench of a thousand automobile exhaust pipes stinging his nostrils, he was like Samson shorn of his hair.

The bleat of an automobile horn roused Shaefer from his melancholy contemplation of his unhappy plight. A huge touring car, headlights glaring in the thickening dusk, was ascending the grade. At the top of the grade, just beyond where he was sitting, the road turned sharply to the right, then descended again. For this reason, ap-

parently, the horn had been sounded, since no car approached from the opposite direction.

The man drove alone. This fact impressed itself upon Shaefer's plastic brain with biting distinctness, to which at first he attached no particular significance. In a moment the car would gain the top of the grade and pass him.

As it neared him Schaefer observed the costliness of its manufacture, the luxury of its appointments. Undoubtedly the man in the driver's seat would be a person of means, of considerable means.

This conclusion suspended itself in Shaefer's brain. He could not decide whether it was of importance to him or not. It swung this way and that, like a weather vane in a vagrant wind.

Now the touring car was within a hundred feet of him. Its blue body and its metal fittings, polished to the brilliance of a steel mirror, gleamed dully in the fading light. Shaefer's bitter consciousness of the poverty of his condition deepened, generated an intense resentment that focused itself upon this resplendent monster and its comfortably enthroned pilot. He moved stiffly upon his hard seat, and his hand touched the weapon which he invariably carried with him in his hip pocket.

The contact had the effect of some miraculous inoculation. Shaefer sat up suddenly, his brain fired by the determination that had flashed into it. The man was alone and would have money upon him! What better opportunity of replenishing his fortune could he expect to find?

He stood up, his lips pressed thinly together, and signaled the approaching car with his left hand. It drew abreast of him, glided to a standstill. Shaefer ran swiftly to the running board, his right arm held tensely at his side.

"Want a lift?" the man called out in a deep, cheery voice.

"Yea, I want a lift all right!" snig-

gered Shaefer, and he thrust his automatic into the man's face. "Hand out what you got!" he snarled. "And be quick about it!"

For perhaps five seconds the two men stared at each other in utter silence. The features of the man in the car were obscured by the gathering darkness. The heavy, shell-rimmed glasses he wore, and his peaked motor-ing cap pulled well over his eyes, still concealed their precise outline.

Shaefer had caught the impression that he was a man of some force of character, one accustomed to command and not to be trifled with. Such men unconsciously radiate the quality of their personalities in a dozen minute ways.

"Come on!" Schaefer continued in his ugly tones. "Let's see what you got!"

The man's mouth—firm and tight-lipped, it seemed to Shaefer—opened slowly. "So you are a stick-up man, are you?" he said in hard, deep, faintly ironical tones. He leaned back in his seat. His hand went to his breast pocket. "Well," he went on, "you seem to have me to rights."

Suddenly, so suddenly that Shaefer had no time to intercept the movement, the man simultaneously flung his head back and struck aside Shaefer's weapon with the back of his hand. The gun exploded, and the man caught Shaefer's wrist in a grip of iron and shook the weapon from his grasp. It clattered into the car.

Recovering himself, Shaefer struck at the other with his left in a withering access of fury, and caught him on the point of the chin. It was a terrific blow, for Shaefer had long since learned how to handle himself in a rough-and-tumble. The blow must have staggered the man, for he let go his crushing grasp of Shaefer's wrist.

Shaefer hurled himself at the man's throat. The other was waiting for him,

for the blow had been less damaging than Shaefer had supposed. They blindly clawed at each other over the side of the car, half in it and half out of it. The inevitable happened. Shaefer's weight dragged his antagonist over the side of the car, and they toppled onto the road and rolled over and over. Chance brought Shaefer out on top, his wiry fingers still gripping the other's sinewy throat.

In a frenzy of rage at the man's desperate resistance Shaefer beat the back of his head against the hard ground once, twice, three times. Then his rage fled, and he loosed his grip of the man's throat and stared at the face vaguely discernible beneath him. The man's head rolled to one side in a sickly, suggestive fashion and became still.

A quivering horror surged up from the roots of Shaefer's being, dispelled the remnants of his insane rage. He shook the body; it was limp. He knelt beside it, listened at its heart, felt at its wrist. He could distinguish no sound, no movement.

His horror sickened him. "I didn't mean to kill him!" he mouthed in stricken accents. "I didn't! I didn't!"

But The Preacher and death were nodding acquaintances, and the will to live was strong within him. He got to his feet, his unshaven face shedding the terror that had come upon it, and peered along the road in both directions. There was no other car in sight.

Shaefer stared at the body, his brow furrowed with thought. He must dispose of it at once if he would preserve his safety. His eyes fell upon the shanty, the rugged outline of which was softened in the marching darkness, and his face brightened. It was just the place. The body might lie there undisturbed for days; weeks, even.

He caught it by the shoulders, dragged it across the road, and leaned it against the slope where he let it sag down limply. Turning to the touring

car, he steered it off onto a narrow strip of gravelly land that divided the slope from the road. Another car might come along at any moment. It was absurd to court disaster.

This accomplished, Shaefer seized the body again and dragged it up the dusty, gravelly slope, inch by inch, foot by foot. Perspiration beaded upon his brow, streaked his grimy face. But at last, with a supreme effort, he got it into the shanty and dropped it with a dull, dead thud on the rotting floor. He straightened his aching back and mopped his glistening brow.

For a moment he stood still, indecision upon his countenance. Then he dropped onto his knees, struck a match, and held the flame close to the still face beneath him.

The man's rough-hewn features were fairly discernible, but those peculiar characteristics of a human countenance which make it individual and recognizable were obscured by the gray dust the gravelly slope had sifted upon them. Curiously enough, the heavy-rimmed glasses still retained their place.

The match burned to Shaefer's fingers. He twisted an old envelope, which he found in his pocket, into a taper, and he stuck it in a crack in the floor and lit it. Then he went through the man's pockets and found a bundle of papers and letters and a wallet containing a hundred dollars or so in bills of various denominations.

For a moment or so Shaefer thoughtfully considered the figure before him. His sharp eyes took in the excellent quality of the light-gray suit, gray cap, and substantial shoes, and observed the striking contrast between this attire and his own. When the man was found his clothing might suggest that he was a person of some importance. Shaefer fingered his unshaven chin reflectively. Suddenly the thought that had been hovering at the back of his mind flashed upon him, took possession of him. He

sprang to his feet, a sinister grin on his face, and ran down to the touring car.

In the tonneau he found a suit case and a club bag. The latter, together with an electric torch which he discovered among the car's equipment, he took back to the shanty. Shaving materials and a small mirror were in the club bag.

Working furiously by the light streaming from the torch, he stripped the man on the floor of his clothing, stripped himself, got into the other's garments, and dressed the man in his own disheveled attire. They were of a similar build, and the stolen clothing fitted him fairly comfortably.

He spread the shaving materials on the floor and stood the mirror against an empty whisky bottle he had found in the shanty. The problem of water bothered him until he discovered a bottle of toilet water in the club bag and made shift with this, shaving himself stickily but effectively.

Presently he studied the effect in the mirror. He was himself again: suave, confident, a man of affairs. Splendid! he told himself. Not only had he revived his confidence in his own powers, he had perhaps concealed the man's identity—an item of no small importance. His spirits soared. He was Samson restored to his strength again! In the lapel of the coat he wore was pinned a white rosebud. It was badly crushed, but he did not remove it. Its fragrance stimulated him.

He glanced contemptuously at the forlorn figure on the floor. His thin lips curled in disgust. The transformation in the other was more profound than in himself. So much the better! If the man was left long enough, the disintegrating finger of time would finish what he had begun. His satisfaction with what he had done deepened, and he congratulated himself upon it. In a spirit of mockery he perched the shell-rimmed glasses upon his own nose,

and to complete the transformation he kicked the whisky bottle near one outflung, limp hand of the body on the floor.

Shaefer pocketed the money and tossed the shaving materials into the club bag. He was about to thrust the papers and letters into a pocket, intending to destroy them later, when his glance fell upon one of the envelopes. An exclamation of astonishment and dismay broke from his lips. The expression of suave confidence upon his clean-shaven face became one of utter terror.

The envelope which had produced this remarkable effect was addressed to Colonel Blessington. In the lower left-hand corner of the envelope appeared the words: "Introducing Mr. Norman Aldeen."

The envelope was open; Shaefer took out the sheet within it and read:

DEAR BLESSINGTON: Sorry I can't be with you. My old sciatica again. I didn't want to disappoint you, so Aldeen, like the good fellow he is, says he will go out alone. Give him a good time. I don't think he knows any of your crowd. He's chock-full of Mesopotamia, but he's modest and you'll have to crowbar it out of him.

FREDERICK NORTHRUP.

The note was written on the paper of the Adventurer's Club.

Shaefer read the note again, his face gone suddenly haggard.

Colonel Blessington and the Blessington emeralds were synonymous terms in crookdom. Shaefer's mouth had watered a hundred times at the mere mention of those marvelous gems and that indomitable figure, their possessor. The Blessington emeralds! One spoke of them reverently, as of some sacred subject, the mere utterance of which was a profanity. They were perfect; they were unequaled; they were worth at least a hundred and fifty thousand to any crook in the land!

But it was not the name of Blessing-

ton that had brought the sweat of terror to Shaefer's brow. Blessington was only Blessington, a stout, indomitable figure institutionalized by his famous gems.

But Norman Aldeen! That intrepid, romantic, unassuming figure of the Mesopotamian sands and the Egyptian deserts, the most famous explorer and archaeologist of the day! That international figure whose name during the year preceding his recent return to America had become a headline feature! "Aldeen, the Invincible," they had called him.

He had gone out to dig in the sands of Mesopotamia for the institutions that had sent him, he had said in his blunt manner of speech, and all the Arabs in Eastern Asia should not stop him. For months his gallant company, under his capable leadership, had carried on punitive warfare with the nomadic tribes of that region. But he had completed the excavations he had been sent to make, and those brilliant contributions of his upon old Mesopotamian civilizations had flung his name around the world in a night. Then he had brought his little company out of the desert, intact as it went in. The newspapers had played him up. He had become the idol of the hour.

Shaefer recalled all this in one shuddering gasp of terror. He, Joe Shaefer, had killed Norman Aldeen!

His panic shook him. He thrust the letters and papers into his pockets, jammed Aldeen's hat upon his head, and snatched up his automatic, the electric torch, and the club bag. Then he dashed down the slope, flung the club bag into the car, and tumbled in after it.

II.

Shaefer drove furiously into the cool, scented night, his terror-fevered brain dominated by an insupportable desire to fling between himself and that inert fig-

ure in the shanty as many hundreds of miles as the great car could cover before dawn.

The night breeze whistled in his ears; telephone poles whirled by; neat orange groves, geometrically patterned, flashed past in rustling, scented processions. Huge blacknesses to the east and the west were the mountains.

Presently Shaefer's hot brain cooled, and he lessened the car's speed. A lifelong habit of self-control reasserted itself, and he began to consider the implications of his position.

He had killed Norman Aldeen, he reflected, but it did not necessarily follow that his arrest would result. Very carefully he went over each detail of the affair. No, he had left behind him no indication of his identity. They would probably find Aldeen, there would be a tremendous sensation, and that would be the end of it. He would drive the car several hundred miles to the north, abandon it before dawn, and entrain for San Francisco. Once there, he would be safe enough.

His stolen garments disturbed him somewhat, now. Had he known it was Aldeen he had killed, he would not have made the exchange. Now, on second thought, it did not matter, though. Aldeen's suit was a common enough shade of gray. However, he would get rid of it in the morning.

Having settled these matters to his satisfaction, he found that his self-confidence surged back and his thoughts turned again to the Blessington emeralds. Toward the foothills lay Blessington's great ranch. An expression of cupidity crept into his suave countenance, but immediately changed to one of deep regret when he remembered that the famous gems, in view of the situation he was in, were farther away from him than they had ever been.

Suddenly he recalled the phrasing of the letter of introduction in his pocket. His light-colored eyes dilated at the

daring thought that flashed into his brain. "I don't think he knows any of your crowd," Northrup's note ran.

Evidently Aldeen did not know Blessington or his friends personally. If he, Shaefer, were to impersonate the dead Aldeen, could he deceive Blessington long enough to get his hands on the famous emeralds? But the idea cooled under his keen scrutiny, and he shook his head with an impatient gesture. It was absurd. What did he know of Mesopotamia other than the fragmentary details he had read in the newspapers? He bent over the wheel and thrust the thought from his mind.

Shaefer had driven ten miles or so when he perceived in the distance the twinkling lights of a small village. It occurred to him suddenly that, beyond an orange or two which he had stolen, he had had nothing to eat since early morning. Thus awakened, his hunger gnawed insistently, and he determined to risk purchasing the food he would need so sorely by morning.

Several minutes later he ran along a paved street and drew up before a cement building which housed a restaurant and a hotel. He was about to get out of the blue touring car when a gray-suited, stout man trotted across the sidewalk from the hotel, hand outstretched, a genial smile upon his ruddy countenance.

"Is this Mr. Aldeen?" he called out in a throaty voice. "That's Northrup's Blue Hazzard car, or I'll—yes, sir, I'll eat my boots! But what have you done with Northrup?"

The stout man seized Shaefer's nerveless hand and wrung it enthusiastically. "I'm Blessington, sir, Colonel Blessington. And this, as you may know"—the colonel waved a massive hand in an inclusive gesture—"is the town of Blessington."

"Don't tell me I've made a mistake, sir," he cried jovially in Shaefer's stricken face. "I'm sure I haven't!

Those glasses of yours, and that rose you know! The newspapers have given them a classic significance! Classic, Mr. Aldeen! But what have you done with Northrup? Don't tell me it's his sciatica! Terrible the way he suffers! Got it in South America, you know! Now, sir, do tell me what you have done with Northrup!"

Shaefer's heart felt as cold and as dead as the hand which the colonel had seized in the grip of welcome. Only so transparent a person as this could have failed to detect the panic he felt sure was written in his face. Denial of the identity thrust upon him rose to his lips, but he shut it off with a trap-like closing of his teeth.

He had come in Northrup's car, he wore Aldeen's glasses and Aldeen's rose, and he had come to Blessington. It would have been strange if the colonel had not pounced upon him. In his heart he cursed the absurd whim that had induced him to wear the rose and the glasses, for he remembered now that both were always striking features of the invariably wretched newspaper portraits of Aldeen.

He forced a grin to his dry lips. "Why, of course I'm Aldeen, colonel!" he exclaimed, injecting into his voice that genial tone he usually could affect so easily. "And it is Northrup's sciatica." He extracted his cold hand from the other's moist grasp and replaced it with Northrup's letter of introduction. "This will explain the situation, I think."

Shaefer had got himself under control by this. He studied the colonel closely and a little contemptuously. He knew the type well enough: Fat and easy-going, wordy and undiscerning; a fund of jokes at his disposal, mostly of the prohibition order, and a private stock which he would display proudly and share generously; probably reducing the number of his daily cigars and lamenting his waistline and his mounting

blood-pressure. But a good fellow and a genial companion for all that—if one did not see too much of him.

And this man was the possessor of the famous Blessington emeralds!

Suddenly this predicament which he had cursed so bitterly but a moment before, assumed a golden tint. The colonel was convinced that he was Aldeen. If he preserved this conviction he might get his hands on the famous emeralds! His heart leaped.

Colonel Blessington pocketed the note. "Too bad!" he ejaculated. "Fine fellow, Northrup. However, we all come to these things. If it's not one it's another. Aren't I right, Aldeen?"

The colonel did not wait for Shaefer's reply to this philosophic observation but rumbled on like a well-oiled machine: "I came down on the off chance of meeting you. Thought something might have gone wrong. These infernal cars, you know! Give me a good horse any day! We'll go back in your car. Mine is across the road." He waved toward a roadster at the opposite curb. "One of the men can bring it."

Shaefer opened the door, and the colonel climbed heavily in beside him. Half a mile or so beyond the village Blessington directed him into a side road which led up to the eastern foothills.

The colonel emitted a continuous stream of conversation, the substance of which was mainly the Blessington orange groves, the Blessington home, the town of Blessington, and Colonel Blessington himself. The latter subject he treated exhaustively.

"I tell you, Mr. Aldeen, when I came here first, the place was as bare as one of your Syrian deserts. Sagebrush and sand and cactus! When I think of what has been done——"

The colonel's wordiness had been a source of much satisfaction to Shaefer. At this point he thought it advisable to interject a complimentary remark.

"I suppose you have had much to do with it, colonel?"

The other cleared his throat. His manner suggested that he had been waiting some such question. "Well," he said, "there are people who say if it hadn't been for Colonel Blessington—"

Shaefer shut his ears and returned to anticipatory contemplation of the colonel's emeralds and to the plan he was evolving to get them into his possession.

It was in this manner that The Preacher came to the elaborate Blessington mansion in the foothills.

III.

At the colonel's direction Shaefer drove the big car into the roomy garage. He would much rather have left it in front of the house, for he intended to make good use of it before the night was over; but he could not very well insist on doing this in face of Blessington's expressed determination that it should be cleaned and polished by his own chauffeur before it went out again. He glanced at the lock of the garage door. It was a good one, but he anticipated no difficulty in picking it with a piece of stout wire which he always carried upon his key ring.

"Now," said the colonel, when they had installed the car, "take a few minutes to freshen up. Then we'll have a bite to eat. I'm sure you are starving."

When Shaefer had come down from the room that had been prepared for him, he found the cold supper which was set before them quite the best he had ever eaten. Blessington's bottled goods were beyond description.

"Nothing like this in Mesopotamia," gurgled the colonel appreciatively.

He still talked incessantly of nothing in particular, but Shaefer detected in his conversation a tendency toward Mesopotamia and archaeology, which he

had tried to discourage several times. He realized that the colonel presently would expect him to recount some of Aldeen's experiences. Luckily Blessington was a bachelor, and the friends Shaefer was to meet were not to arrive until the next afternoon. He must make one or two vague references to Mesopotamia and archaeology, imply the innate modesty Northrup had attributed to Aldeen, and promise to go into the subject fully the next day. This would hold the colonel's faith in his integrity.

Presently they went into the library, smoking the colonel's fifty-cent cigars. It was here that Shaefer hoped and rather expected to find the emeralds. His light-colored eyes flashed around the long, book-lined room, but he saw no safe. This did not dismay him, for he had thought it unlikely that the safe which contained the gems would not be concealed.

They settled themselves in overstuffed chairs before a fire of eucalyptus logs. A dreamy warmth permeated the room. Shaefer thought that everything was going as well as could be expected—if not better.

At the colonel's elbow were cocktail materials. He pushed them toward Shaefer. The latter declined regretfully. He did not explain that he wished to keep his head clear.

Colonel Blessington puffed on his cigar. "Glad to be home?" he remarked tentatively.

The inevitable moment had come. Shaefer pulled himself together and smiled knowingly. "Rather!" He blew a smoke ring lazily toward the ceiling.

"Pretty warm out there, one way or another, eh?" Colonel Blessington seemed in a listening mood.

"It was exciting at times," admitted Shaefer. His calm demeanor gave no indication of the tumult within him. He had no idea that one could know so little as he about Mesopotamia.

The colonel tried another tack.

"That's a good article in the current *Eastern Traveler*," he observed.

Shaefer looked up. "What was that?" he inquired casually.

Blessington seemed surprised. "Why," he exclaimed, "that article on yourself!"

"Oh, of course!" Shaefer reddened. "Yes, no doubt! no doubt!" He got himself in hand again. If only he could induce the old fool to talk of emeralds instead of Mesopotamia!

"Pretty sound man, Tate," the colonel went on.

"Tate?" responded Shaefer cautiously.

The other looked at him in astonishment. "You must know Tate! Henry Tate!"

Shaefer smiled disarmingly. "Oh, Henry Tate! Certainly! Yes, sound, as you say! Sound as a dollar!"

"He writes well, too."

"Yes; he's very clear," ventured Shaefer.

"He says you are a hard man to interview."

"Does he?"

The colonel's cigar, en route to his lips, poised in mid-air. "My dear Aldeen!" he remonstrated. "Of course he does! In this article in the *Eastern Traveler*."

Shaefer bit deeply into his cigar. "To tell the truth, colonel," he said, forcing a grin to his twitching lips, "I haven't read it. I read so much—about myself—" Shaefer paused; his suave countenance expressed a modest embarrassment.

Blessington flung his head back and roared with laughter. "Northrup was right when he said we'd have to crowbar it out of you! Well, I'm going to let you off until to-morrow. Grimshaw and Morrison are tremendously interested in you. I give you fair warning, sir; they'll not let you off."

Shaefer concealed his vast relief and smiled good-naturedly. "I'll do my best," he promised. So that was over!

Now if only he could get the colonel onto the subject of emeralds!

"Your modesty reminds me of a story I once heard about a man," the colonel said puffily. "He was in the jewelry trade—"

Shaefer seized upon this golden opportunity. "Pardon me, colonel," he interrupted swiftly, "your allusion to jewelry reminds me that you bear some reputation as a collector of precious stones. I seem to remember hearing of the Blessington diamonds, or the Blessington pearls."

The colonel blew a huge cloud of smoke at the ceiling. "Emeralds, Aldeen. The Blessington emeralds!"

Shaefer nodded. "Yes, emeralds—now I come to think of it." His eyes rested ever so lightly on the other.

Pride of possession crept into the colonel's ruddy countenance. "Yes," he admitted with praiseworthy modesty. "My collection is esteemed rather highly. You are interested in stones?"

Shaefer nodded with the proper degree of enthusiasm. "Yes, indeed! I saw quite a few of them in the East."

"Did you! Whose were they?"

Shaefer bit his lip. He had not counted on Blessington's connoisseur's enthusiasm. "Oh, er, I met a buyer for one of the London houses in Cairo. I've forgotten his name. He had a lot with him. Rubies mostly."

The other nodded, and Shaefer thought he had got out of the difficulty rather neatly.

"My great grandfather began collecting emeralds a hundred years ago," the colonel explained. "His descendants have added to the original number. I may tell you, sir, the collection is worth at least three hundred thousand dollars."

Shaefer expressed his astonishment and concealed his delight. This was better than he had expressed!

"You may as well see them now," the colonel went on, easing himself out of

his chair and walking toward the door of the library.

Shaefer followed, his manner casual. Actually he was trembling with excitement. His eyes were bright, contracted a little, and riveted upon the slow-moving Blessington. The next minute or two would reveal the success or failure of his scheming. Would he be able to observe the mechanism of the colonel's burglar-alarm devices? Perhaps. Could he get close enough to Blessington to read off the combination of the safe as he turned the dial? It seemed unlikely. Failing these desirable eventualities, he would crack his host on the head with the butt of his automatic, tie him up, and make off with the stones. It was ridiculously simple.

The colonel, unaware of his guest's scrutiny, chatted pleasantly with Shaefer as the latter, having picked up a magazine, followed him into the hall. Blessington crossed the reception hall to one of a number of panels depicting landscapes painted on the wainscoting—it was the fifth from the right and the third from the floor, Shaefer noted—and pressed the two right-hand corners of the panel. The panel slid back, and the colonel, without comment, pulled down an electric switch set in a niche behind it. An alarm connected with the safe, no doubt, Shaefer concluded. He would remember that. When the colonel turned round, Shaefer stood within the library door idly turning the pages of the magazine.

Coming into the library again, Blessington stopped before a section of the bookcases devoted to thick volumes of philosophy which, doubtless, he had never read. He removed Herbert Spencer's "Principles of Psychology," which stood at one end of one of the shelves, and inserted a chubby finger into a boring in the heavy oak end of the shelf and pulled mightily. Some nine square feet of philosophy of various kinds swung outward on hinges.

Behind it stood a heavy iron safe which was bolted to the floor of the room.

Blessington dropped onto his knees, squinted at the dial, and turned it indecisively several times.

Shaefer peered cautiously over his shoulder, still turning the pages of his magazine, but to his intense disappointment he could make nothing of the figures on the dial, the safe being completely in shadow. His fingers clasped the automatic in his pocket. Luckily the library door was shut, and the servants were in bed. His mouth tightened; his compact body tensed for that one swift, downward, stunning blow that should deliver a fortune to him.

The colonel turned around with a rueful grin, and Shaefer became absorbed in his magazine. "My eyes are not as good as they were, Aldeen. You might hold that reading lamp on the table," he requested, naturally enough, for nothing was further from his undiscerning mind than suspicion of the integrity of the great Aldeen.

The pitch of desperation to which Shaefer had whipped himself momentarily obscured the significance of this request. Then it flashed upon him. The old fool was playing into his hands! He held the reading lamp over the colonel's shoulder, and the numbers upon the dial sprang into his range of vision.

"To the right twenty-three, left seventeen, right ninety-eight, left one hundred." Guided by the colonel's pudgy fingers, the combination sang itself into Shaefer's receptive brain. His blood tingled in his veins. At last he was to see, to touch, and, later, to possess, the famous Blessington emeralds, those gems of which a hundred fabulous yarns had penetrated the dark and devious paths of crookdom.

The colonel set two covered, shallow trays upon the table. "You must tell me, Aldeen, if in all your travels you have ever seen a finer collection than

this." His tone suggested considerable doubt of such a possibility.

Slowly and ceremoniously, as if he were uncovering some ancient relic, Blessington drew the wooden slides along their grooves, laid them aside, and parted the white satin covers beneath. "There!" he exclaimed to the awed Shaefer.

Arranged in the form of crescents upon two couches of gleaming white satin lay the Blessington emeralds, like green fires on a lake of ice. They were indescribably beautiful. The light of life lay in their hearts, winked audaciously at the astounded Shaefer. At the apex of each crescent rested a great, gorgeous stone, a king at the head of a realm of princes.

Shaefer stared at them like a man who has come upon a treasure, the magnificence of which trebles his expectations—as indeed he had.

"Superb!" he whispered at last. "Superb!" He touched the two great emeralds with trembling fingers, lifted them, set them in the palm of his hand, caressed them reverently as if they were twin philosopher stones.

"There are seventy-four of them," he heard the colonel rumble complacently as from a great distance. "Great grandfather, Elias P. Blessington, collected twenty of them; grandfather Jonas F., twenty-two; my father, Daniel D., eighteen; and I, the rest."

Shaefer nodded absently. It was their value, not their chronological history that enthralled him. They should bring at least two hundred and fifty thousand if he sold them right. What a haul! His heart pounded at the thought of it.

"Well, sir, what do you think of them?" demanded Blessington in challenging tones.

Shaefer descended to reality. "They are wonderful!" he exclaimed enthusiastically.

The colonel laughed triumphantly and returned the emeralds to the safe.

"I thought you'd say so," he declared puffily when he had closed the safe and returned its philosophic barricade. "I intend to go on collecting them as long as I live," he continued when he had thrown "on" the switch in the hall.

Shaefer glanced casually at his watch. It was nearly midnight. A fever of impatience to do what he had to do and to get away, fell upon him. He pretended to conceal a yawn behind the back of his hand. The colonel saw it as Shaefer intended he should and, examining his own watch, suggested that they retire.

IV.

When he had come into his room and locked the door quietly behind him, Shaefer unstrapped Aldeen's suit case, the contents of which he had not yet seen. Within it he found a dark blue suit which he determined to put on over the gray one and thus add to the confusion of his pursuers.

Having deftly removed all tailor's identification tags from both suits, he pulled the blue on over the gray. The fit was uncomfortable but bearable. A pair of heavy golfing stockings, which he discovered in the club bag, he drew on over his boots.

This accomplished, Shaefer sat down at a writing desk and in a disguised handwriting wrote:

DEAR COLONEL: Awfully sorry to leave you at this early hour, but a forgotten engagement compels me to do so. I shall probably be back before dinner to-night. I have a key which fits the lock of the garage, so it is not necessary for me to rouse you or the chauffeur. I shall explain more fully this evening.

NORMAN ALDEEN.

Shaefer grinned sardonically as he reread the note. He had no hope of it fooling the colonel for very long, but it might delay his pursuit for several hours. He laid the note upon the table and looked at his watch. It was one o'clock. He would wait half an hour.

At precisely one-twenty-nine Shaefer

stood up, pocketed his automatic, and picked up his flash light; decisiveness of movement characterized every action. He gave a last look around the room and, finding everything to his satisfaction, snapped out the light and stepped into the corridor, closing the door softly behind him.

The entire first floor of the house was in utter darkness. Having located the secret panel and thrown the switch, he passed into the library and pushed the door to behind him. The shadows within the room fled before the sweeping circle of light thrown by his torch. He flung open the French windows to facilitate his escape, should some unforeseen emergency develop.

This accomplished, he swung aside the barricade of philosophy, dropped onto his knees before the safe, and directed the circle of light upon the combination dial. His long, sensitive fingers trembled as he swung the dial back and forth in the numbered sequence that should open the magic door of fortune. Completing the combination, he seized the handle. It held! He tugged at it madly, the sweat of sudden desperation upon his forehead. It still held! A withering imprecation broke from his dry lips.

But he pulled himself together again, remembering, as he did so, that he might have twirled the dial too rapidly for the drop of the tumblers. He swung it back and forth once more, whispering the talismanic numbers, a warm moisture upon his tingling body.

Again his fingers grasped the handle, but a moment elapsed before he could compel them to obey the urge of his will and attempt to turn it. The bolt shot back with a metallic click that sped a wave of ecstasy through him. He flung open the door, whipped out the jewel trays, and thrust his quivering fingers among those shimmering green fires. Their touch, cooler than ice to his hot hands, thrilled him with an un-

precedented happiness. He scooped them up, cupped his hands, and drank in their flaming beauty.

Here lay the key to that life of comfort, security, and respectability which he had craved since reaching his years of understanding. Respectability! The word sang in his ears! Not that he cared a rap for the morality of the term. It was only a profound admiration for that quality of solidity, which the term also connoted, that his worthless and dangerous contact with life had so deeply instilled in him.

He let the flaming mass cascade between his parted hands into one of the satin-lined trays beneath. It fell, a shimmering yellow and gold and green waterfall, a minute Milky Way in the room's tiny heaven.

The exigencies of the present recalled him. He stowed the emeralds away in the pockets of his inner suit, returned the trays to the safe, locked the door, and swung the bookcase section back into its place. Then he extinguished his torch and was about to make for the open window when he remembered, with a shiver of apprehension, that he had not yet rethrown the switch in the hall. He turned toward the library door.

At that moment there came a sharp click, and the room was flooded suddenly with light. Within the open door stood Colonel Blessington, a flushed and very indignant-looking colonel indeed, and a compactly built man with a rugged, haggard face, vaguely familiar to Shaefer, whom he regarded with a peculiar expression of mild amusement.

For perhaps ten seconds this impressive tableau endured in unbroken silence. During this minute span in the spin of the suns an eternity of thought whirled in Joe Shaefer's brain. He saw Aldeen, dead, in the shanty; he saw himself taken by this compact, haggard-faced man—a cop, no doubt, for he had seen his face somewhere in his

troubled past; he saw himself dying the ignominious death the law had decreed to him. And he saw the solitary chance that remained to him.

The window was open, he had a gun in his pocket; Blessington was dressed and probably had the keys of the garage upon the key ring which he knew Blessington carried. The squandering of life that stood between him and his liberty troubled Shaefer not in the least. One hangs as easily for one dead man as for three. It was his only chance, and he took it.

He dropped the electric torch and clutched the automatic in his coat pocket, directed it upon the haggard-faced man, and fired. But he was just one second too late—so thin is the hair that suspends life above death!—and the bullet went wide. The haggard-faced man had fired from his coat pocket, too. Shaefer felt a thud as of a mighty fist upon the middle of his body. A sharp, dreadful agony seized upon him, then a sickening nausea. His legs crumpled like dried reeds; a cold mist swept down upon him, chilled him to the bone. Through it he saw vaguely

the haggard-faced man leaping toward him, a wisp of gray smoke coiling up from his right-hand coat pocket.

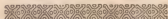
Then the floor rose to meet him, and he lay on his back, twitching a little. The mists thickened around him, obscured his vision, but he could still distinguish the haggard-faced man who was bending over him now, deep concern upon his white face. Who was this man? Some phantom from his receding past, no doubt.

"I'm sorry! I'm sorry!" said the man in deep, gentle tones. "I didn't mean to kill him!"

The man's deep voice, and those familiar words which Shaefer himself had uttered so recently, touched the strings of his aching memory. Suddenly he knew, and the irony of it twitched his thin lips into a blasphemous curse.

But apparently the haggard-faced man thought The Preacher was asking a question, for he nodded his head as if he were answering one.

"Yes," he said in his deep voice, "I'm the man you didn't quite kill. I'm Norman Aldeen, the explorer."



GOOD HOMES AND CRIMINALS

RAZOR" FENTON, a former crook and now a reformed citizen, who is giving his talents to the lecture platform, recently revealed an interesting side light on the vexed question of environment. Mr. Fenton insists that the influence of a too-moral home may result in creating as bad a criminal as an environment wholly vicious. He says that the atmosphere of a house that is too strict is sure to drive the young man to gang life for relief.

Apparently the effect of a strong and respectable bringing up may be said to deepen the very qualities of daring, strength, and determination which are such strong assets when the bad qualities in a youth get the whip handle. According to Fenton, pool rooms, dance halls, and other places that compete with the home in affording recreation for young men, are more responsible for teaching criminal ways than any other agencies in the community.

We are not aware that criminologists have ever emphasized these occasional bad effects of good home conditions. The majority of criminals who are captured appear to be victims of mental derangement or disease, undeveloped minds, or they are lacking in moral stamina. By way of correcting this opinion, Fenton points out that generally the most successful criminal of all is the one of good family and education, who is tempted into crime, and not forced by the example of his environment or by poverty.

Is the Brainy Crook Extinct?

By Edmond Richards

A CRIMINOLOGIST recently declared that there were no more brainy crooks. "There is no more originality in crime to-day," he declared, "than there is in literature. Brainy crooks went out with the original poets." According to this authority the methods of the present-day thief, burglar, holdup man, and other varieties of lawbreakers lack all originality and are slavishly copied from their brilliant predecessors.

The officers of the law, detectives, and men who have to deal directly with the criminal classes, do not agree with this easy generalization. The crime detectors say that where one brain labors to protect, another brain is busy inventing a way to destroy.

Certainly it would seem that the criminal of 1923 is harder to catch than his predecessor of two or three generations ago. Surely brains are much in evidence in this particular circumstance. Clever crooks may have diminished in number, but certainly they are not extinct. So well-known a detective as Harry V. Daugherty was recently asked for his opinion. "I have never seen a clever crook, because if he were clever he would not be a crook."

The criminal classes of to-day, however, he asserted, differed widely from the crooks of yesteryear. "In times gone by," he said, "the criminal that to-day is mixed up in holdups, would have been a high-class safe burglar or cracksman, and to associate him with as low a class as the gorilla holdup man would be to insult his intelligence. Owing to the invention of burglar-proof safes and modern inventions, especially electrical equipment, this crook has been outwitted in his special line. In the past two decades he has been obliged to turn his wits to other equally productive lines of crime. The result is the stock swindler, the oil-well con man, the wire men, and the Raffles type of high-class crook.

"The man who in the old days would have been a potential safe cracker turns out to-day to be a holdup man. His main qualification now as in the past is the nerve that comes of physical prowess, and to-day, more so than ever before in the history of crime, multiplied by the use of drugs. This sort of criminal is much more dangerous than his old-time prototype, and for this very reason. Ask any detective or physician or neurologist who has investigated murder cases, and he will tell you that the criminal who uses drugs is a fiend par excellence."

Another detective, a man familiar with the criminals of two decades ago and those of to-day, when asked if there were any clever crooks left, gave a very affirmative answer. "There were clever criminals yesterday; there are clever criminals to-day; there will be clever criminals to-morrow. Crimes have changed, and the types of criminals with them, but the confidence man or the loft robber or the safe ripper of to-day is as clever as was any criminal of thirty years ago."



MISSING

This department conducted in duplicate in DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE and WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, thus giving readers double service. It is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request under "Blind", if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable.

If it can be avoided, please do not send us a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that these persons who are so specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," or cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

COLLYGE.—I would like to correspond with any one of this name, as I am anxious to learn something of my father's people. He came from West Virginia. Hattie Collyge Williams, Route 2, Fairland, Oklahoma.

HUGHES, HILDA, formerly of Bolas, Idaho. An old friend would like to hear from her, or to get news of her, and will appreciate any information as to her present address. There is important news awaiting her. E. D. U., care of this magazine.

TURNER, CLARENCE, is asked to write to his friend, G. A. Wetman, Elkton, Maryland.

DOW, WALTER HENRY.—When last heard of he was in Boston, Massachusetts. His son would like very much to hear from him, or from any one who can give information as to his whereabouts. Walter E. Dow, care of this magazine.

CARMICHAEL, C. D., who was known to his pals as Coby or Billm. He came from Waycross, Georgia, and was last seen in Montana on his way to Vancouver, B. C. Any information about him will be greatly appreciated by E. Romero, Nogales, Arizona.

SULLIVAN, JACK E., or **CHARLES JEROME MARCHER.**—Any one who can give information about him will do a great favor by writing to his father, E. F. Marcher, care of this magazine.

CHARLES.—Of course you know we shall always love you just the same. We have no key to the auto-ped house. We both hope you are well and happy. Father and Mother.

CHATMAN, HARRY.—Please drop us a line at once, as we have some important news, also a proposition to make that, I think, will suit you. At least do not fail to write and give us an address at once to which we can answer. O. G. S.

WESTBROOK.—This family left North Carolina shortly before the Civil War and settled in Coffee County, Alabama. Pernie and Zilphie Westbrook were the parents of Catherine, Jack, Clarice, Moses, and Susie, all of whom are dead except Moses, who now lives at Ramer, Alabama. Zilphie's maiden name was Hill, and she had a brother called Rud. Information about any relatives of these names will be gratefully received by E. C. Westbrook, care of this magazine.

BILLS, ALLEN.—When last heard of he was working in Jeannette, Pennsylvania. Any one who knows where he is now will do a great favor by writing to his brother, Private Vorn T. Billie, Battery C, 50th Artillery, Fort Shafter, Honolulu, H. T.

EMDEN, FRED J.—He has not been seen since November of last year. He has a sister in Indiana and three children in Oregon. Any one who knows his whereabouts will do a favor by writing, or by telling him of this notice. Mrs. C. M. Bitt, care of this magazine.

BUDDY FLIPP.—I have left the army and am anxious to hear from you. Please write at once to Buddy Hunt, William Lewis, 3161 Fillmore Street, San Francisco, California.

KING, JACK.—He was last heard of in Glendale, Oregon, in May, 1922. His old buddy would like to hear from him, and his mother is grieving for him. He is asked to write at once to Merrill A. Ballewe, General Delivery, San Jose, California.

DONAHUE, DOROTHY.—She is asked to write to an old schoolmate of Brooklyn, West Virginia, who will greatly appreciate any information as to her present whereabouts. Private O. R. Van Blarcom, Service Company, Fort Clayton, Panama, Canal Zone.

EDWARDS, ALBERT.—He married Eliza Nallie in New Jersey, and moved to Ohio with his brothers and sister about seventy years ago. Later it was heard that he had bought land in Whitefish, Wisconsin, and went there with his family. A near relative would like to hear from his children or grandchildren, and will gratefully appreciate any helpful information. Mrs. John Sellers, Deshler, Ohio.

HOOK, CHARLIE.—When last heard of he was conducting a business in or near Springfield, Missouri. A relative would be glad to hear from him, or from any one who can give his exact address, and will appreciate any helpful information. B. M. H., care of this magazine.

POWERS, LUCY, who lived at Senate, Missouri, in 1915, and who has a daughter named Hazel. She has relatives named Bohannan. Any information regarding her whereabouts will be appreciated by Doctor H. Ray, Homan, Arkansas.

MITCHELL, DICK or CLARENCE.—He is an electrician and automobile mechanic, and when last heard of was out West. His grandfather wants him, and will greatly appreciate any information as to his present whereabouts. John B. Goodley, 324 Graysville Street, Sullivan, Indiana.

ROLF, GARDNER, formerly of Palmer, Massachusetts, and last heard of en route for Wyoming. He has been some four or five years. He is about twenty-five years of age, with light hair and blue eyes. Information that will help to find him will be appreciated by Mrs. W. H. Graves, Palmer Road, North Wilbraham, Massachusetts.

C. J. F.—Let me hear from you at once, as I have important news for you. At same old address. E. F. H.

NAGEL, MRS. KATE.—She was last heard of in Springfield, Illinois, twenty-five years ago. She has children or grandchildren of J. M. PENRY WILSON, who lived in Kentucky. A relative would be glad to hear from any of these people. Mrs. Mamie Wilson, 219 Water Street, Orange, Texas.

KINNEY, JAMES.—He was last heard of in New York City about one year ago, when he was living on Broadway. Any one who knows his whereabouts will do a favor by writing to G. A. Ouzie, care of this magazine.

STOOPS.—Information is wanted regarding the relatives of SYDNEY STOOPS, who died on September 24, 1904, and will be greatly appreciated by his daughter, Hazel, care of this magazine.

DANIELS, CHARLES A.—He was last heard of in Hastings, Nebraska, eighteen years ago. Any information about him would be gratefully received by his sister, I. M. R., care of this magazine.

CHAPIN, PAUL, who left Springfield on April 8th last, is asked to write to Molt, in care of this magazine, and to send an address where a letter will reach him.

MADDEN.—My father, Cornelius Eugene Madden, was born either in Texas or Ohio. He had one brother that he knew of named John. He was adopted when he was a small child, and was known to his children by the name of Madden. He was married twice, and at one time was a school-teacher and also a carpenter. His daughter would be glad to hear from relatives, or from any one who knows them. Mrs. C. Madden Jones, care of this magazine.

TEX.—Please write to me. I am very anxious to hear from you. Your pal.

SMITH, WILL.—He was last heard of in St. Louis, Missouri, fifteen years ago. His cousin would like to hear from him. Also from two half brothers, BILL and JIM AUSTIN, and from one half sister, SAL. AUSTIN, who were last heard of about thirty-five years ago in Arkansas. Any information that will help to find these relatives will be gratefully appreciated by the Smith, 604 North Oklahoma Avenue, Okmulgee, Oklahoma.

HARLAN, CLARENCE.—He was last heard of in Nashville, Tennessee, in May, 1915. He is six feet tall, with fair complexion, light hair, and blue eyes. He is well educated, of a roving nature, an artist by nature and a tramp by habit. His friends would like to hear from him, or have him call at their homes. Edward K. Carney, Route 5, Joelton, Tennessee.

DAY, LAUREN.—She is English by birth, a brunette, and when last heard of was in Fort Worth, in 1922. There is important news for her and she is asked to write at once to Mrs. R. F. Fartick, 1103 South Akard Street, Dallas, Texas.

BIERER, GEORGE and AMELIA BLANK.—I was born in Buffalo, New York, on October 24, 1897. My name was Edna Bieher. I was put in an orphan home from which I was adopted when I was five years old and taken to Pennsylvania. I would be very happy if I could hear from some of my relations, and if any one knows of them they will do a great kindness by writing to me. Mrs. B. E. C., care of this magazine.

HAD.—Please write to me. I am still at 1326 Charlotte Street, Kansas City, Missouri, and am waiting for you to come home. Heber.

WAKEFIELD, OAKLEY C.—He was born in Anderson, South Carolina, on August 28, 1899, left home in October, 1920, and went to Newark, New Jersey. From there he went to Montreal, Canada, at which place he was last heard from. Any information that will help to know his present address will be gratefully received by E. O. Wakefield, 629 Sixth Street, Thomas, Alabama.

REEDY, JOHN D.—He disappeared from Des Moines, Iowa, in 1904, and was last heard from in Springfield or Dayton, Ohio. Information about him will be gratefully appreciated by his daughter, Mrs. Cecelia Reedy Puckett, Ankeny, Iowa, R. B. 1.

SMITH, WILLIAM H.—He left Gushetia County, Arkansas, about forty years ago, and went with his wife and three children, Sara, Lizzie, and Willie, to Texas, and has not been heard of since. He had a sister, Rosa Lee Smith, who married George Darrin, and his wife had a brother, Wait Evans. Any information regarding his children will be gladly received and appreciated by his niece, Mrs. R. L. D. Wheatby, Box 368, Camden, Arkansas.

COHEN, SAM (SIMON KOMOROFF).—When last known he was employed by the Van Noy's Interstate Company between San Francisco and San Jose, California, in 1916-17. He left his home in Buena when he was a boy and lost all trace of his people during the World War. They have now been found and any one who knows his present address will do a favor by writing so that they may get the information that is waiting for him. C. H. Rowland, care of this magazine.

STAFFORD, BESSIE.—She was last seen by her sister in Atlantic City about ten years ago, and a month later she wrote from Baltimore that she had married a man named Philip Harrison of Clarksville, West Virginia. She has not been heard from since. She has dark-gray eyes and brown hair and is about thirty-two years of age. Any one who can give information about her will do a great favor by writing to her sister, Edna Stafford, 2140 East Albert Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

MORRIS, NATHAN.—He is thirty-six years old, with blue eyes and brown hair, and was last heard of in Albuquerque, New Mexico. His daughter would appreciate any information concerning his whereabouts. Alvin Morris, care of this magazine.

ATKINS, PEARL, who was last heard of in Grand Junction, Colorado, and is believed to have gone from there to Alaska. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated by Oris Atkins, 1931 Seventh Avenue, Greeley, Colorado.

McINTOSH, WILLIAM LAFAYETTE.—He was put in the Michigan State School at Coldwater on April 7, 1909, and later was adopted from there when he was a baby. He will be thirty-one years old next September. His sister is very anxious to find him and will gratefully appreciate information as to his present home. Mrs. Edith McIntosh, care of this magazine.

HARRIS, MERDEN.—He is thirty-one years old, five feet eight inches tall, with brown hair, light-gray eyes, and sandy complexion. His wife and children are very anxious to hear from him and will gratefully receive any helpful information. Mrs. Martha Harris, Box 23, Halston, Nebraska.

LARABE, MRS. LURA PEARL.—She is twenty-seven years old, about five feet four inches tall, with dark-brown hair and eyes, and was last heard from in Los Angeles in September, 1920, where she went just after she was married to Hank Larabe of Lincoln, Nebraska. Her maiden name was Beaumont. Any information given information as to her whereabouts will do a favor by writing to her sister, Mrs. Fred Smith, North Russell Street, Urbana, Ohio.

RODGERS, WILLIAM PRICE and SILAS.—The last time that William was heard of he was in Denver, Colorado, about nineteen years ago, and was in or near Boise, Idaho, twenty-three years ago. Their sister is seeking them and will be very grateful for any helpful information. Mrs. O. C. Clements, Corona, New Mexico.

HELEN.—Please come to see me if you can possibly do so, or send me your address. Mrs. D. Ricker, P. O. Box 143, Spring Valley, New York.

CABRERO, FREDERIC, who formerly lived in Mexico City is asked to write to his old friend, who is very anxious to communicate with him. A. Creel, care of this magazine.

JORDON, ELMER.—Any one who knows his address or can give information about any of his children will do a favor by writing to his niece, Mrs. Bessie Dickson, 933 Seaside Avenue, Teminal, California.

WILLIAMS, EARL.—He is five feet six inches tall, with brown hair and blue eyes. He traveled with the Donald McGregor Show of McAlester, Oklahoma, for nearly three years, then joined another show in Oklahoma. He served in the World War, was gassed and crippled. Any information as to his present whereabouts will be greatly appreciated by Clarence Hay, Wellington, Kansas.

BONERS, RAYMOND E.—Please write, no matter what the trouble may be. Everything is O. K. here, but I am unhappy without you. Write to 3520 Van Buren, 6000. Dorothy.

DANIEL, DAVE.—He is about thirty years old, with dark hair and eyes, and is sought by his sister, from whom he was separated when he was a young boy. He was brought up in Springfield, Missouri. Information that will help to find him will be gratefully appreciated by Mrs. Ervin Harwood, Route 4, Needles, Kansas.

LARCIKE, MRS. EDITH.—She was last heard of in Newport Richer, Florida, four years ago. Her cousin would like to hear from her, or from any of her friends. Mrs. Mamie Kemp Boyle, 31 Asholt Street, Dalton, Massachusetts.

FRISSEN, AUGUST.—He was last heard from in 1920, at Fisher, North Dakota. He is a Swede by blood, is tall, broad-shouldered, with light hair and blue eyes, and is about twenty-seven years old. He may be known by the name of Anderson. His people are very anxious to find him. Please write to his sister, Mrs. Julia Young, Box 70, Priest River, Idaho.

FORESTER.—An actor of this name, whose wife was Ella M. Hattan, was reported to have been drowned in California, and his daughter is very anxious to correspond with relatives. Information that will help her to find them will be gratefully received. Mrs. Will Hinde, R. R. 1, Des Arc, Arkansas.

STONE, WALTER A. whose last address was in Watertown, South Dakota. He is of light complexion, with brown hair and blue eyes. Also **CYRUS L. FLYMESSE,** who was in Corinthian, Kentucky, and was last heard from who served five years in the army. Information that will help to find these two men will be gladly received by Clifford and Neuman, R. F. D. 8, Chikaskia, Oklahoma.

KINSEY, SHERMANT, of Mount Victory, Ohio. Information as to his whereabouts is desired by H. M. Walters, 700 East Market Street, Lima, Ohio.

JUMONVILLE, EDDIE A.—He is twenty-three years old, with dark eyes, black hair, and ruddy complexion, and was last heard of in Plattenville, Louisiana, nearly three years ago. Information as to his whereabouts will be greatly appreciated by his buddy, who served in the U. S. Army with him, and who hopes that he or some of his family may see this and write to him. Edward Paul Gantz, 256½ Madison Street, New York City.

ENGSTROM, OSSIAN W. who was last heard from at Oakland, California. Any person who knows where he is will do a kindness by writing to his friend, Earl E. Haack, P. O. Box 183, Shakopee, Minnesota.

LAUGHLIN, LESTER C.—He is twenty-six years old, about six feet tall, and has black hair. He was last heard of in Omaha, Nebraska, about one year ago. His mother is worried about him and is quite sure that he is still alive. Information that will help to know where he is will be gratefully received by his brother, John C. Laughlin, 211 East Franklin Street, Jackson, Michigan.

MILLER, CORLISS J.—He has been missing since 1919, and his relatives are very anxious about him. His baby was not quite one year old when he went away, and his wife has been ill ever since. He is very tall, over six feet two inches, with light hair, blue eyes, and fair complexion. He has several gold teeth and wears a small mustache. Information that will help to find him will be most gratefully received by E. M. O. care of this magazine.

BEAL.—My father, John T. Beal, married in Texas between 1890 and 1895. My mother died when I was a baby, and he moved to Wichita, Kansas, where he died, and I was sent to Scottsville, Virginia, to his father, Joe Beal. I was six years old when my father died, and am now thirty-nine. He was a harness maker and had a shop in Wichita. He got into a dispute with the town marshal one Saturday night in a barroom, and shots were exchanged, the marshal wounding my father, but he fled on the Monday following. I don't know my mother's maiden name, but I think her first name was Jennie. If any of her relatives are alive I would like to hear from them, and still be grateful for any information that would help me to find them. John T. Beal, care of this magazine.

SAMUEL V.—Everything is O. K. I have enlisted in the army for Hawaii. Please go home or write to dad, or to me. Your brother Salvador, 13th Field Artillery, Schofield Barracks, Honolulu, H. I.

HOSP, WILLIAM R.—Please come home. I did try to find you in Chicago. Was called to the bedside of our child. Will be very happy to hear from you. Mrs. Edna Hosp, General Delivery, Fort Worth, Texas.

SAWYER, INEZ, "SPUDS." of Backus, Minnesota. Have written to both your addresses, but get no reply. Please write to Twin Sister, care of this magazine.

CREIGHTON, THOMAS IRVING, who may be known as Tom Irving. He left his home in 1910, and was last heard from in Buffalo, New York, in 1917. His wife and daughter are still living at the same place in Ontario, New York. He is sixty-one years of age, about five feet eleven inches tall, of light complexion, and has two fingers taken off at the first joint on one hand. Any information that will help to find him, or to learn what has become of him, will be gratefully received by a brother, David Creighton, 510 Duval Street, Fort Morgan, Colorado.

SPANISH WAR VETERANS.—Any one who served on the U. S. S. "New York" or "Marietta" during the Spanish-American War, kindly send address to E. M. Kidder, 18793 Oakman Boulevard, Detroit, Michigan.

LACEY, WILLIAM.—He was born in England, where he married a girl named Bursland, Staffordshire. He was last heard from in Boston. His sister Kate would be very happy to hear from him, or from any one who can tell her where he is. Mrs. Kate Blackburn, 48 Cypress Street, Buffalo, New York.

L. W.—All are anxious to communicate with you at once. Please write. O.

LOGON, ALBERT LEVY.—He is a carpenter, is about forty years of age, tall, of dark complexion, with small black eyes. His left leg has been broken above the ankle. He left his home in June, 1922. Any one who knows his whereabouts will do a favor by notifying his wife, Mrs. A. L. Logon, Fleetwood, North Carolina.

ORR, ROBERT.—He was last heard of in Andrews, North Carolina, in 1911. His daughter would like very much to hear from him and will appreciate any helpful information. Mrs. Margie Bradley, P. O. Box 323, West Tulsa, Oklahoma.

IRENE, who left home two years ago, is asked to write to her sister. Her father is falling in health, and it is hoped she will see him and write without delay, just to let her family know that she is well. Her silence is causing great anxiety and sorrow. Mrs. Moddie Demaris, 415 North Hamilton Street, Saginaw, Michigan.

MARSHALL, AMANDA, who married a man named Tom Hinton or Hinnand, who died, leaving her with several children. She was last heard of at Telfair, Georgia, about twenty years ago. Her brother would be glad to hear from her and will greatly appreciate any helpful information as to her whereabouts. J. C. Marshall, Broken Bow, Oklahoma.

MONTAGNE, ROY.—Please write home to mother, who is very much worried about you, and is anxious to know if you are alive and well. Your sister, E. M. Montagne, 1413 Third Avenue, Charleston, West Virginia.

CHERRY, TERESA.—She was born in Hungary in 1888, and came to the United States in 1905. She was employed as a waitress on Third Avenue, New York, and lived there for some time. She disappeared in 1916. Any information that will help to find her will be gladly received and appreciated by Mrs. Marie Tachler, care of this magazine.

JURS, HENRY.—He has been missing since August, 1920. He is twenty-seven years old and is an ex-Canadian soldier. His mother is falling fast through grief for him. Any information as to his whereabouts will be gratefully appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Eva Edminster, 2995 Howard Street, San Francisco, California.

ANDERSON, JOHN and MINNIE.—They were last heard of in Franklin, Pennsylvania. Their parents were John and Sadie Anderson. Their uncle would be glad to hear from them and will appreciate any helpful information. John W. Davis, Box 749, Taft, California.

EDMONTON.—Write or wire me at once. Everything forgiven. If short of funds you may draw on me. Sam.

BILL and MAC.—They were sailors on the U. S. S. "Tupelo" during the war, and while in Cardiff promised to give their home addresses to some friends, but their ship sailed without warning and they have not been heard from since. They were always known as members of the friends with whom they had tea at the cafe of E. E. Jones. It is hoped they will see this and drop a line to James J. Carter, 31 Janet Street, Spodlands, Cardiff, South Wales, Great Britain.

SERRIS, GERALDINE FAY.—She was last heard from in the spring of 1920 in Cleveland, Ohio, but lost touch for her home in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. Information as to her exact address will be gratefully appreciated by a friend who has important news for her. J. M. N., care of this magazine.

ROSS, JAMES.—He was last heard of about fifteen years ago. He is in the boot manufacturing business somewhere in Lower Canada. Before going there he lived on Greenland Street, Liverpool, England. Any information that will help to learn his whereabouts will be gratefully appreciated by his niece, Margaret Murphy, care of this magazine.

BARTHOLOMEW, NOEL.—He was last heard of in Vancouver, British Columbia. He is about one inch taller with light hair and blue eyes, and has been missing for four years. His wife would be very happy to see him again, and cannot understand why he does not come home. He has a baby boy whom he has never seen, and who would be glad to know his daddy. His wife is waiting for him to return. All is forgiven and forgotten, whatever it may be, and she hopes that he will see this and write to her. Mrs. Hattie Bartholomew, care of this magazine.

GERAGHTY.—I would like to hear from brothers who left Swallowell, County Durham, England, about 1873. They were the sons of William Geraghty of Dublin, and it is believed that they went to Philadelphia. Any information will be appreciated by their sister, Elizabeth Brophy, care of this magazine.

G. V.—Bertha is at Barendstraat, 68, Amsterdam, Holland. Albert also is in Holland. We are all well. Mrs. A. G. van Apeldoorn, P. O. Elphinstone, Manitoba, Canada.

BURNS, D. DAN.—He has been missing from his home since July 4, 1922, when he left Pullmont, New York, to go to New York City. He is thirty-eight years of age, five feet six inches tall, had been wounded in the right leg and head, and has a slight limp. He has brown hair, blue-gray eyes, brown mustache, and weighs about one hundred and eighty-five pounds. He has a German watch with a bronze star, 1914, with his name and regimental number. He is apt to lose his memory and forgets who he is and where he comes from. Any information that will help to find him will be gratefully appreciated by his wife, Mrs. R. D. Burns, care of this magazine.

BUDDY.—I have not changed. There is important news. Write to Paul.

SCHERER, GOLDIE.—Please write to me, as I have important news for you. Information regarding the whereabouts of this person will be gratefully appreciated by Beatrice Griffin, 46 Jenkins Avenue, Columbus, Ohio.

E. O. Y.—Please write to your wife at Canton, Ohio.

HAD and CAD.—We are back in Columbus. Our address is 1300 Hildreth Avenue.

BURGHES, W. E.—Please write home at once, as your folks are very anxious about you. Any one who knows where this young man is will do a great favor by writing to his sister, who will greatly appreciate the kindness. Mrs. Anna de Artime, 3911 East Fifty-fifth Street, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

PARKER, SALLIE, BESSIE, ELLIE, OPAL, who left Oklahoma, Texas, twenty years ago and went to Reno, Oklahoma. Their old friend would be glad to hear from them. Mrs. P. L. Walker, Canton, Texas.

McKINNEY, BELLE or IDA, of the family of Eli McKinney, who was a blacksmith at Farmington, Illinois. An old friend would be glad to hear from any of the family. C. J. Wright, Route 3, Box 19, Phoenix, Arizona.

GREGORY, HELEN.—If you will write home to the same old address I will be sure to get it. Cema.

REITZ, SAMUEL, who was last heard of in O'Brien, Washington, about fourteen years ago, is sought by his nephew, who will greatly appreciate any information as to his whereabouts. A. A. Reitz, care of this magazine.

HOWELL, FRANK and FRED.—They were last heard of in the home of the Children's Society of Missouri in St. Louis. Any information as to their present whereabouts will be gratefully received by their sister, Mrs. Marie Winkelman, 29 Freelinghusen Avenue, Newark, New Jersey.

GISH, ELLA OPAL.—Come home at once. Everything is all right. There is a letter for, General Delivery, Baltimore, Your brother.

EDDIE.—Please send an address to your mother, so that she can write to you at any time. All is forgiven. Morrie.

HEESE, HENRY.—The children are still looking for a letter. Please write, if only to let them know the father is in, and to let us know that you are all right. F.

ROHNBERG, KNUT FREDRIK.—He was born in his wife and two sons, William and Nels, in Birmingham, Alabama, where he worked in a piano factory. If he or either of his sons should see this they are asked to write at once to C. O. Rohnberg, Karlbergsgatan 52, Stockholm, Sweden. This is urgent.

ISOM, VINNER.—He is thirty-one years of age and was last heard of in Powers, Oregon, in 1921. His wife is anxious to get news of him, as she does not know what has become of him, and his children need him badly. If he is dead she would like to know the date and place of his death. It is thought that he might be in the oil fields in Arkansas or Oklahoma. She will gratefully appreciate any helpful information. Mrs. Janette Isom, Hackberry, Alabama.

DOHERTY, JAMES H.—He was last heard from at Weston, West Virginia, in 1899. He is about fifty-seven years old, five feet nine inches tall, and was born in West Chelmsford, Massachusetts. He has two sisters, Anna E. and Mary L., also a brother, Edward S. Any one who knows his whereabouts will do a favor by writing to R. A. Colbert, 139 Wendell Street, Providence, Rhode Island.

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Inside back cover

Missing Page

Back cover